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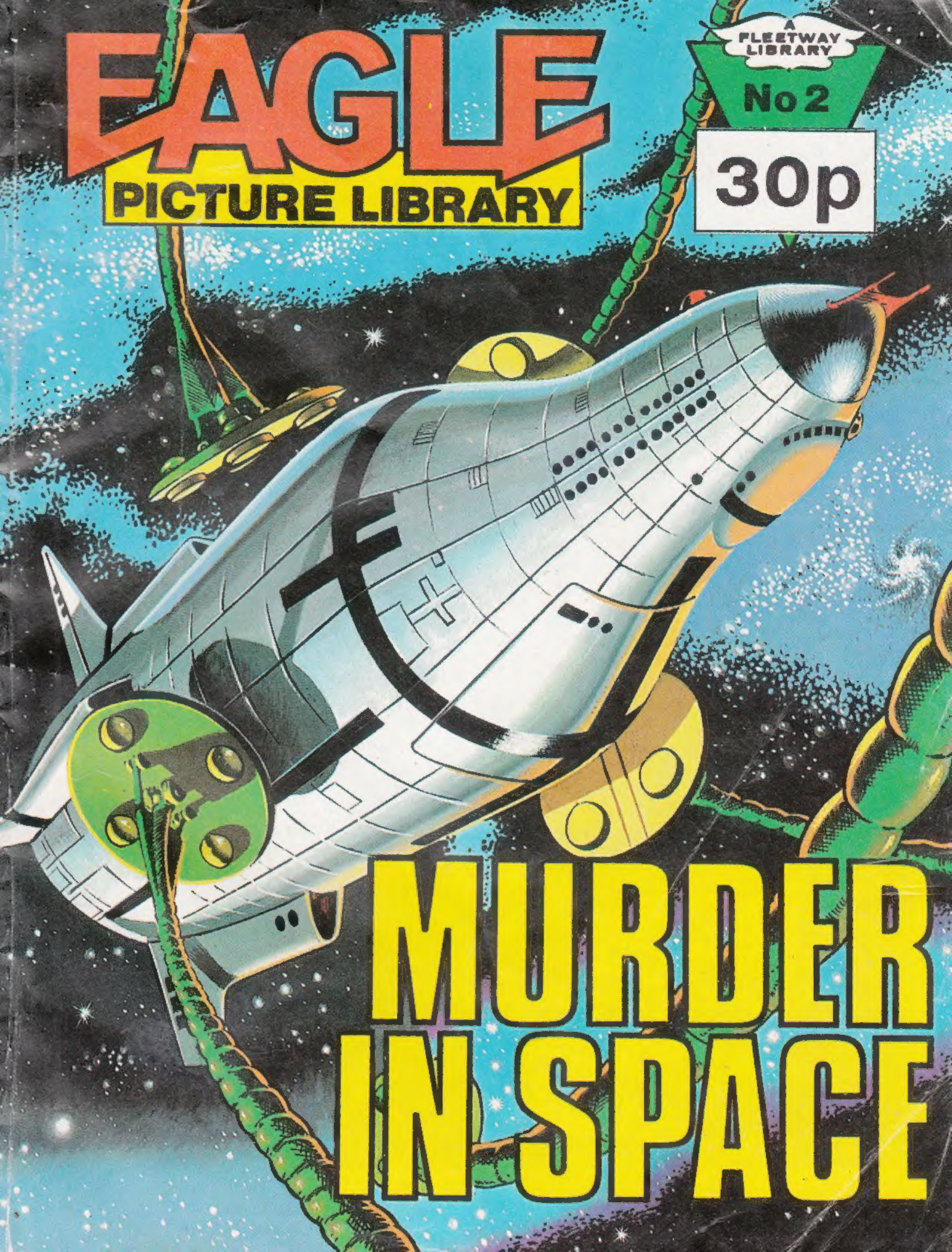

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MURDER IN SPACE

AS MAN EXPLORES THE LIMITLESS, UNCHARTED DEPTHS OF SPACE, HE HAZARDS HIS LIFE IN A THOUSAND DIFFERENT WAYS, NONE STRANGER THAN THAT IN OUR STORY...

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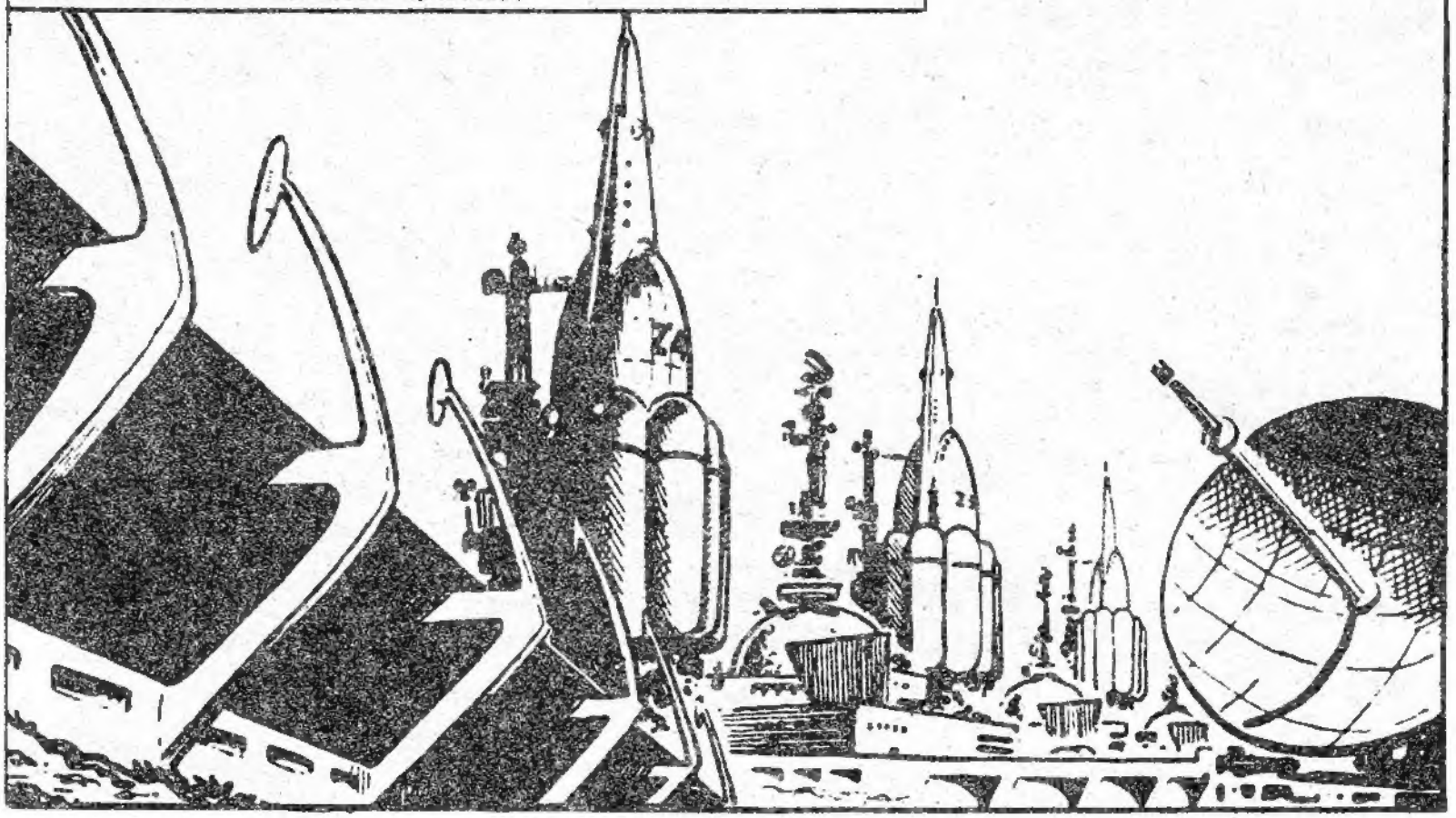
PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED

CERTAIN SECTORS IN SPACE BRED MORE THAN THEIR NORMAL QUOTA OF DISASTER. IT WAS R.A.F. SPACE-DEFENCE COMMAND'S DUTY TO FIND OUT THE CAUSE AND OBLITERATE IT. THEIR PATROL AND COMBAT SHIPS STOOD IN TWENTY-FOUR HOUR READINESS . . . .



CREWS OF HIGHLY-TRAINED YOUNG MEN WERE HOUSED IN SPECIAL QUARTERS, SO THAT THEY WOULD BE CONSTANTLY ON HAND TO PILOT THE MACHINES TO ANY CORNER OF THE HEAVENS. JET-ACE LOGAN AND HIS PAL PLUMDUFF CHARTERIS WERE TWO OF THESE. THEY WERE INDULGING IN AN IMPROMPTU GAME OF RUGGER IN THE MESS

HEY! MY BOOKS!

OVER TO YOU, CHARTERIS!

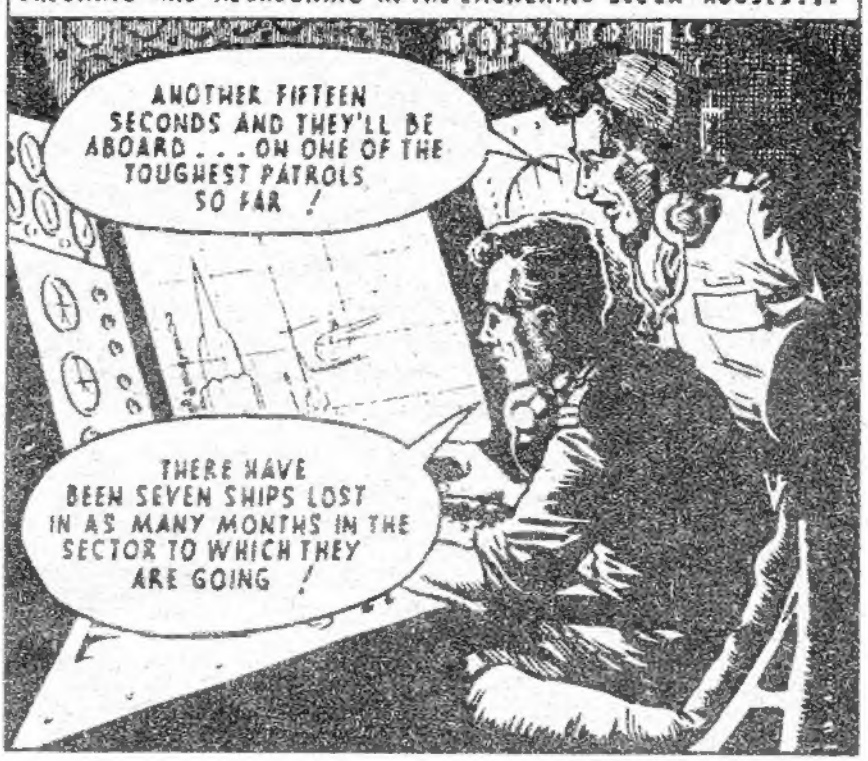
SUDDENLY JET-ACE PAUSED AND LOOKED TOWARDS THE DOOR . . .
HEY, FELLERS — LOOK WHAT'S BLOWN IN!
I'M HENDERSON! I'VE JUST BEEN POSTED HERE TO . . .
. . . TO FILL UP A VACANT PLACE ON THE CREW LIST. WE KNOW!
THEN EVERYONE IN THE ROOM SURGED FORWARD AND SURROUNDED THE NEWCOMER. HE THOUGHT THAT THEY WERE COMING TO SHAKE HIS HAND, BUT LOGAN AND CO. HAD OTHER IDEAS . . .
HEY! HE-EEELP!
LET'S PUT THE NEW SPACEMAN INTO ORBIT FELLERS'!

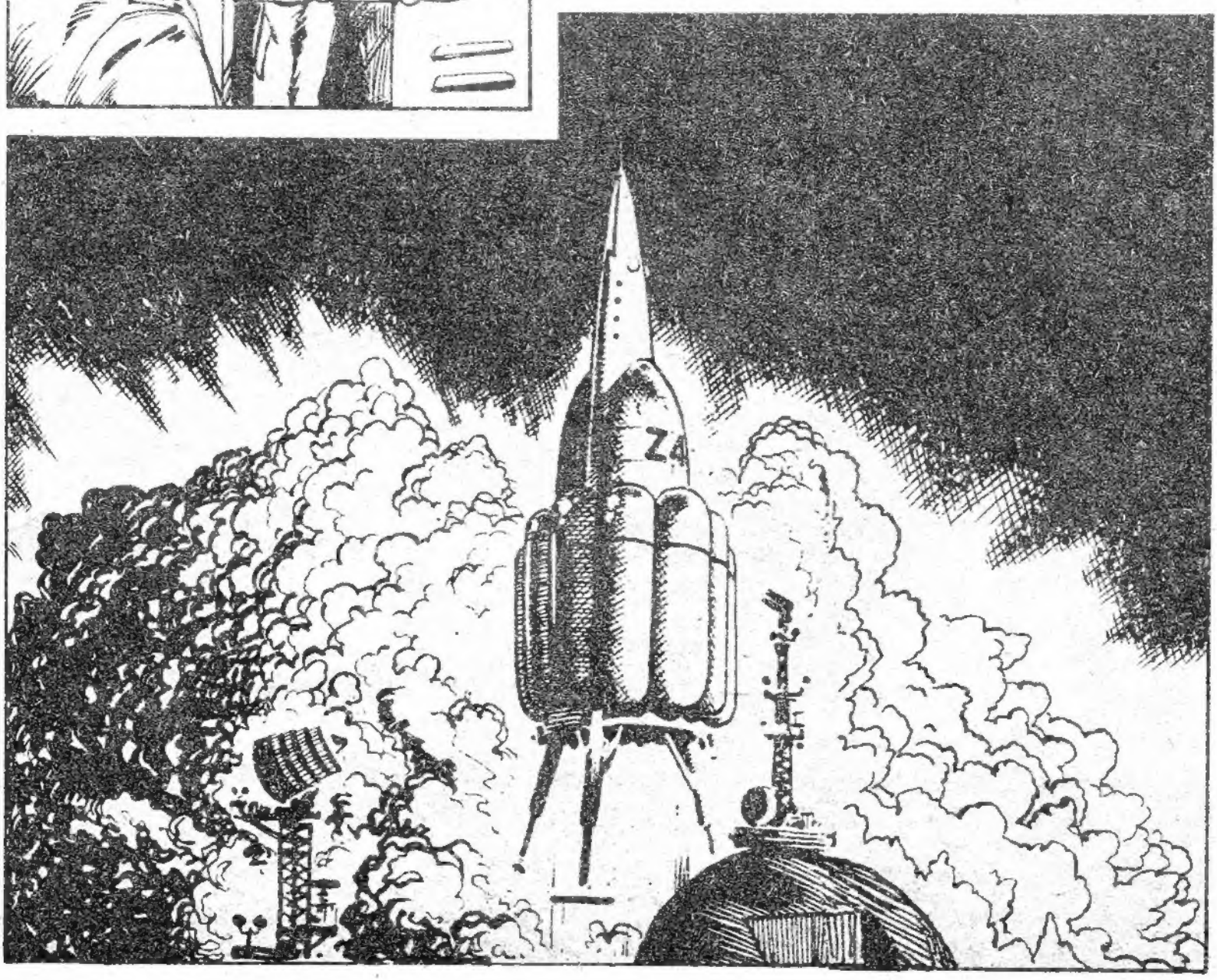
HENDERSON'S TRAJECTORY ENDED IN A SKID LANDING AMONGST THE LITTER ON TOP OF A ROW OF LOCKERS. AS HE LANDED AN ALARM LOUD-SPEAKER SHOUTED INTO HIS EAR!
STANDBY! STANDBY! CREW FOUR - SCRAMBLE! SCRAMBLE!
THE LOUD SPEAKER CLICKED AND DIED. ANOTHER VOICE, EQUALLY HARSH AND METALLIC, TOOK ITS PLACE FROM THE DOORWAY — THE VOICE OF COMMANDER COBB!
YOU HEARD THE ORDER... SCRAMBLE! THIS ROOM OUGHT TO BE EMPTY BY NOW! MOVE! MOVE!

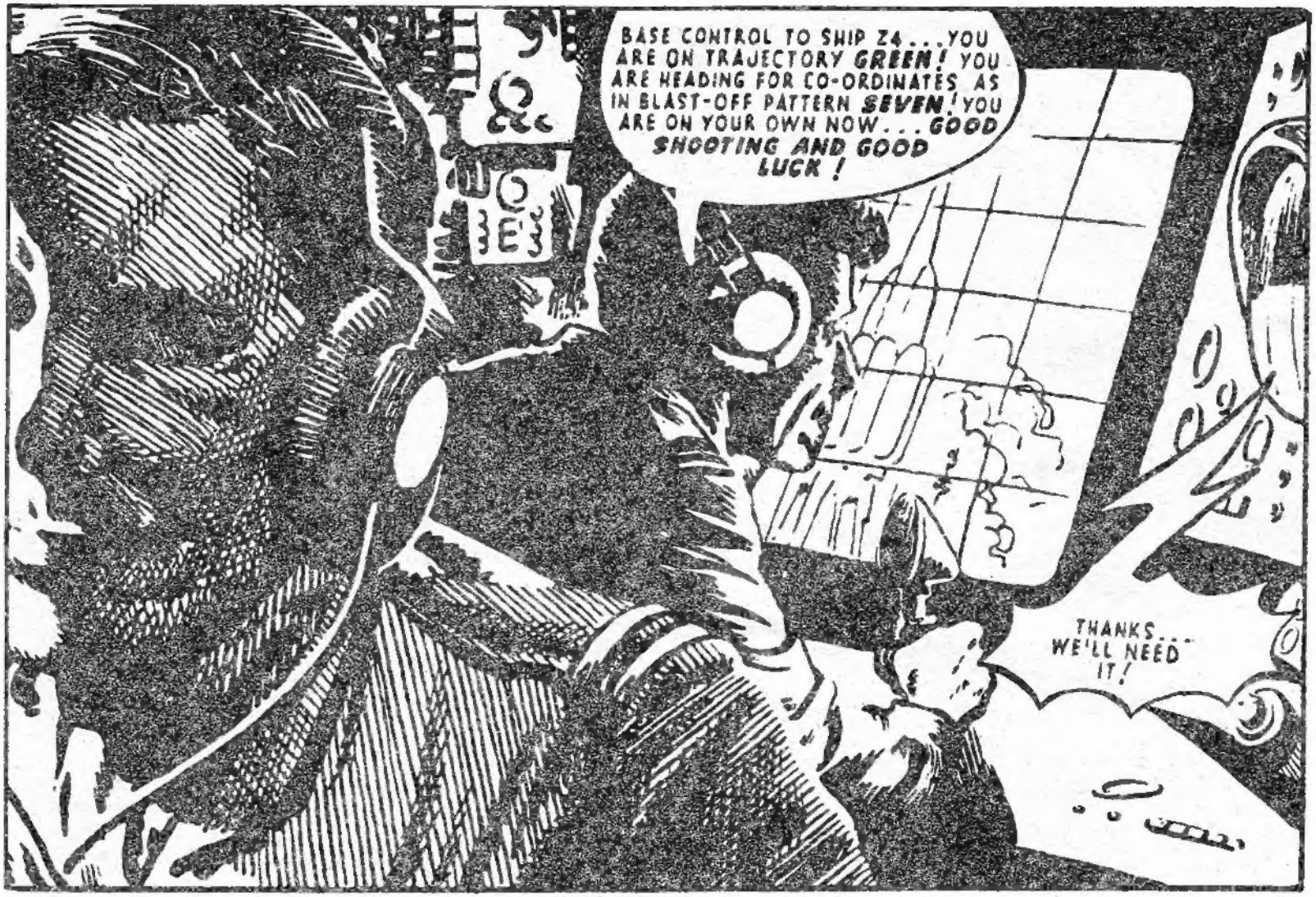
AS THE MARTINET SENIOR PILOT SNATCHED HIS OWN KIT FROM HIS LOCKER HE SAW THE PINK-FACED HENDERSON PEERING DOWN AT HIM!

HOW IN THE NAME OF THE SEVEN-SIDED SUN DID YOU GET — UP THERE?
I WAS-ER-PUT UP HERE, SIR-BY A CHAP NAMED LOGAN, I THINK, SIR!
I THOUGHT AS MUCH! ONE DAY THAT SPACE-CRAZED IDIOT WILL GO TOO FAR!

HIGH-SPEED JET-COPTERS WHISKED THE TEN-MAN CREW OUT TO THE CONSTANTLY READY SHIP. TEAMS OF TECHNICIANS WERE CHECKING AND RECHECKING IN THE LAUNCHING BLOCK-HOUSES...


ANOTHER FIFTEEN SECONDS AND THEY'LL BE ABOARD... ON ONE OF THE TOUGHEST PATROLS SO FAR!
THERE HAVE BEEN SEVEN SHIPS LOST IN AS MANY MONTHS IN THE SECTOR TO WHICH THEY ARE GOING!




BASE CONTROL TO SHIP Z4 . . . YOU ARE ON TRAJECTORY GREEN! YOU ARE HEADING FOR CO-ORDINATES AS IN BLAST-OFF PATTERN SEVEN! YOU ARE ON YOUR OWN NOW . . . GOOD SHOOTING AND GOOD LUCK!
THANKS . . . WE'LL NEED IT!

SO FAR THE LAUNCHING INTO A SPACIAL ORBIT HAD BEEN EFFECTED ENTIRELY ACCORDING TO PLAN. ABOARD THE SHIP, COMMANDER COBB PREPARED TO TRANSFER THE MOTION INTO TIME-SLIP . . . AND ACCOMPLISH A JOURNEY WHICH WOULD NORMALLY TAKE LIGHT YEARS IN A MATTER OF DAYS!
PREPARE FOR TIME-SLIP ENTRY . . . STAGE ONE!
HENDERSON, GO AND CHECK THE COURSE-TRACKER SERVOS. I'M GETTING NO READING FROM THEM!
RIGHT, JET-ACE!

THE PREPARATIONS WERE ROUTINE, BUT COMPLICATED, AND IT WAS SEVERAL MINUTES BEFORE HENDERSON WAS MISSED...
WHERE'S HENDERSON?
HE'S DOWN IN THE SERVO-ELECTRONICS WELL, CHECKING THE COURSE-TRACKER MECHANISMS.
BUT I'VE ALREADY DONE THAT...

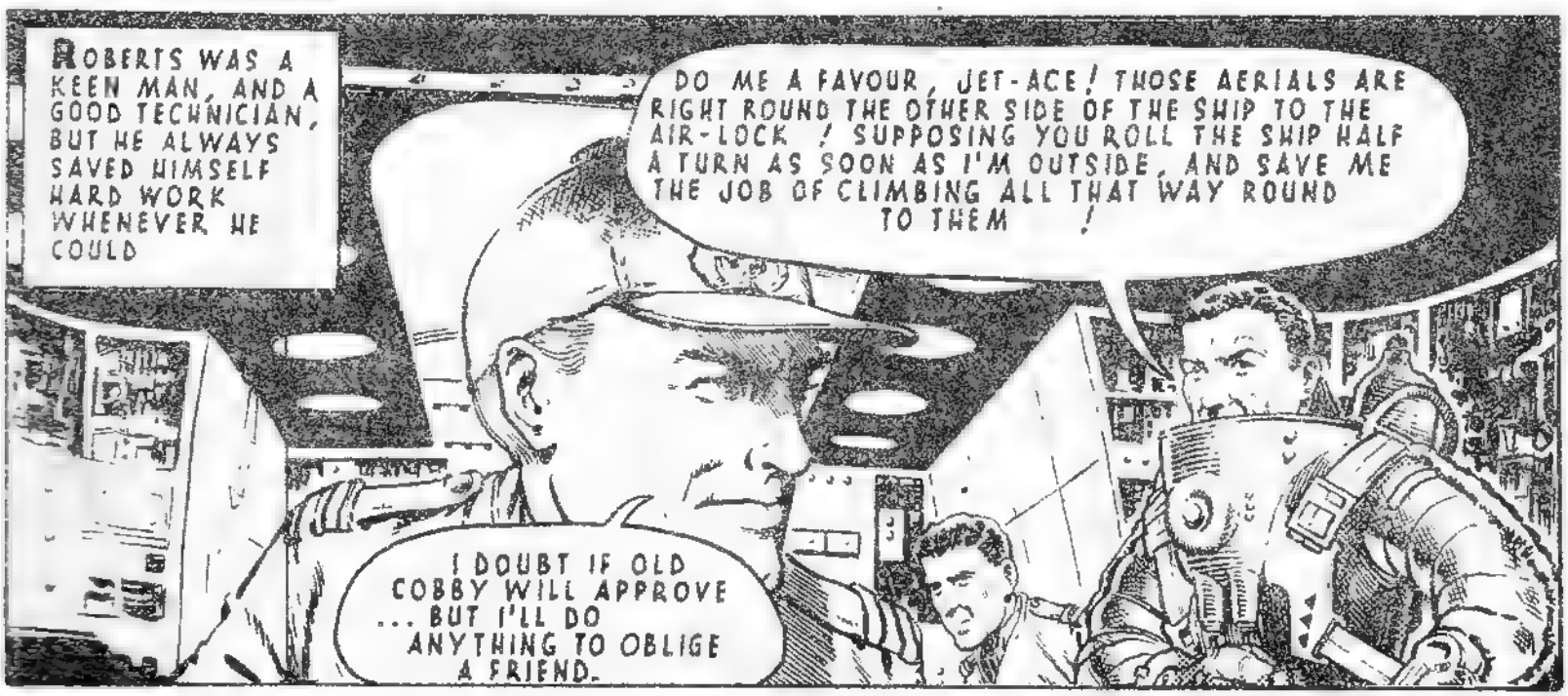
WELL, YOU DIDN'T CHECK 'EM PROPERLY, BECAUSE THEY'RE STILL NOT REGISTERING!
IF THIS IS ANOTHER OF YOUR PRACTICAL JOKES, LOGAN, I'LL HAVE YOU BUSTED DOWN TO SPACEMAN TENTH CLASS!

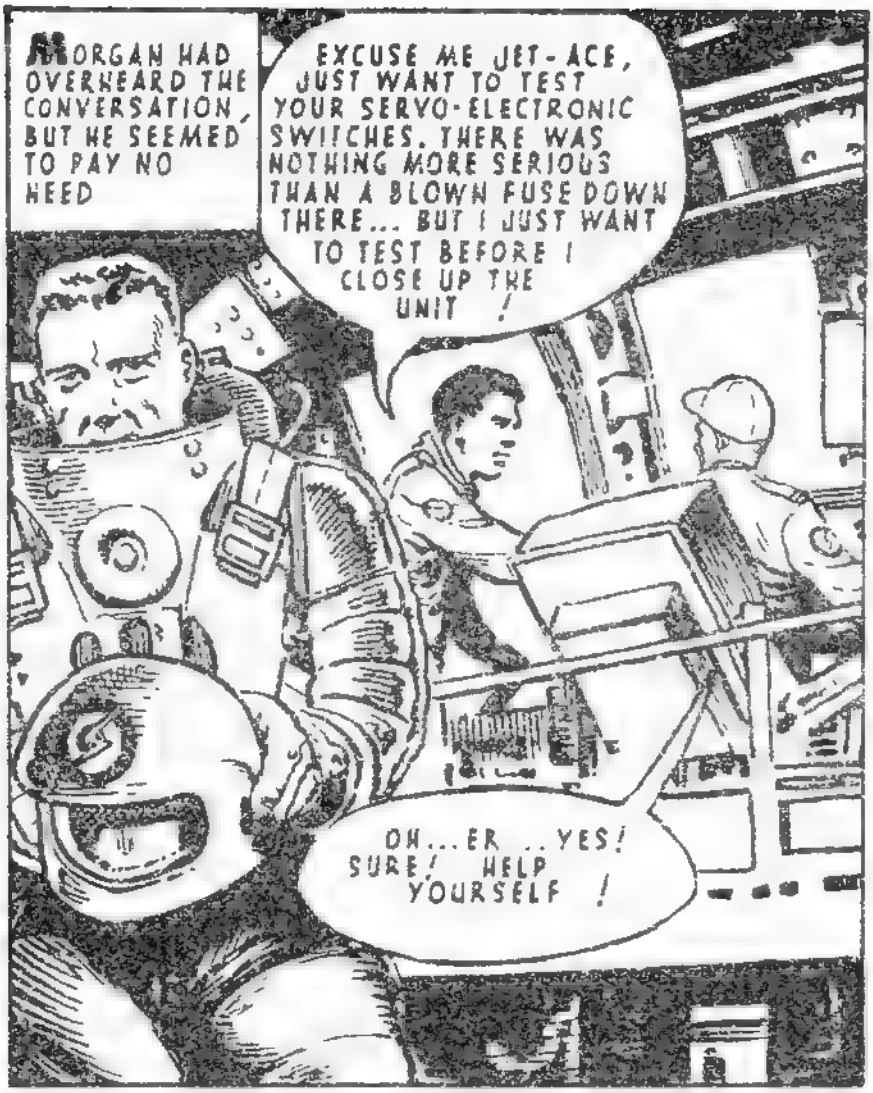
BUT AS PLUMDUFF WENT DOWN THE STAIRS —
THIS IS NO JOKE, SIR! HENDERSON'S DEAD!

JET-ACE LOGAN COULD NOT LEAVE THE CONTROLS, BUT HE SAW THE OTHERS ON DUTY IN THE CONTROL ROOM CRUSH TOGETHER AT THE TOP OF THE STEPS LEADING DOWN TO THE ELECTRONICS ROOM...
HEY, FELLERS... DON'T LEAVE ME OUT HERE IN THE COLD! TELL ME WHAT'S HAPPENING!
COBB PUSHED HIS WAY THROUGH THE CROWD AND KNELT BESIDE THE BODY...
STABBED THROUGH THE HEART ... BUT HOW? AND BY WHOM?
ONE OF THE CARD-PUNCHING DRILLS IS MISSING FROM THIS UNIT HE HAD OPENED UP! MAYBE THAT WAS THE WEAPON!
THESE THINGS ARE ONLY MEANT TO PUNCH A CARD AND KEEP A RECORD OF THE SHIP'S COURSE. THERE MUST HAVE BEEN A COLOSSAL BUILD-UP OF ELECTRICAL ENERGY TO SHOOT ONE OF THESE RODS OUT FAST ENOUGH TO KILL A MAN!
THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO FOR POOR HENDERSON, BUT THE SHIP WILL HAVE TO GO ON! MORGAN, KILL ALL CIRCUITS IN THAT COMPUTER UNIT UNTIL YOU'VE FOUND THE FAULT AND FIXED IT!
YES, SIR!

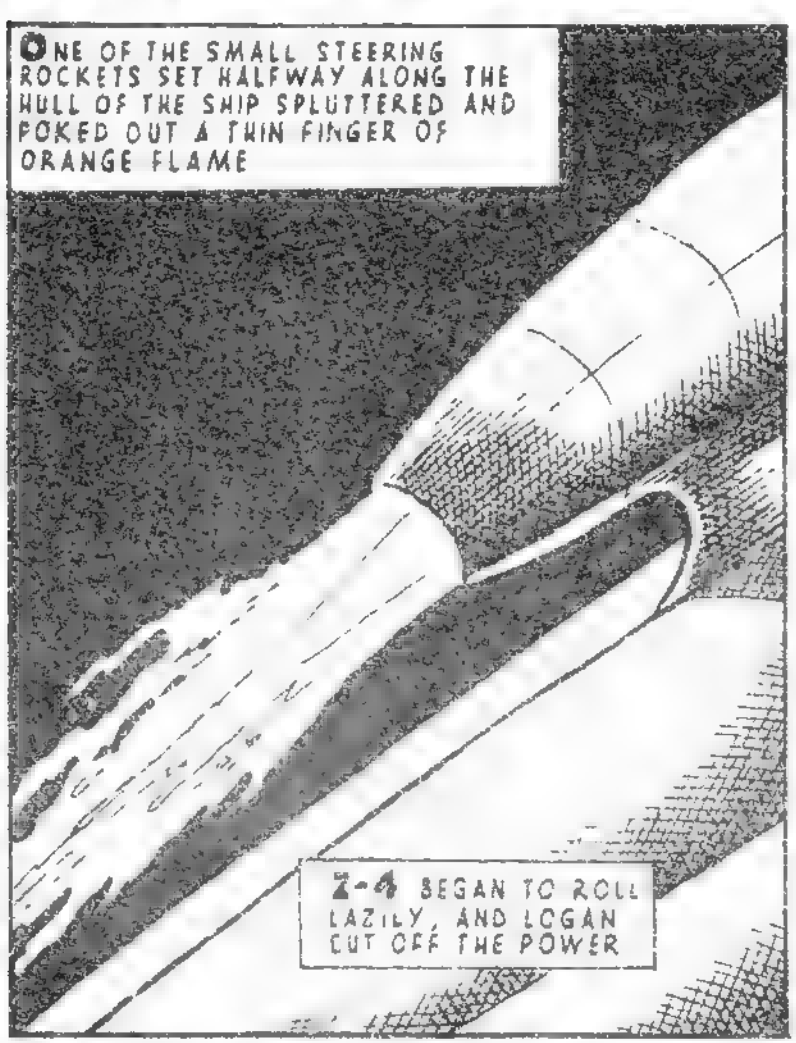
HOW MUCH LONGER DO I HOLD THE SHIP IN THIS "WAITING" ORBIT, SIR ?
UNTIL CHARTERIS HAS GOT THROUGH TO BASE WITH A REPORT ON HENDERSON'S DEATH !
IT MIGHT TAKE A WHILE YET, SIR ! I CAN HEAR THEM BUT THEY CAN'T SEEM TO RECEIVE ME !

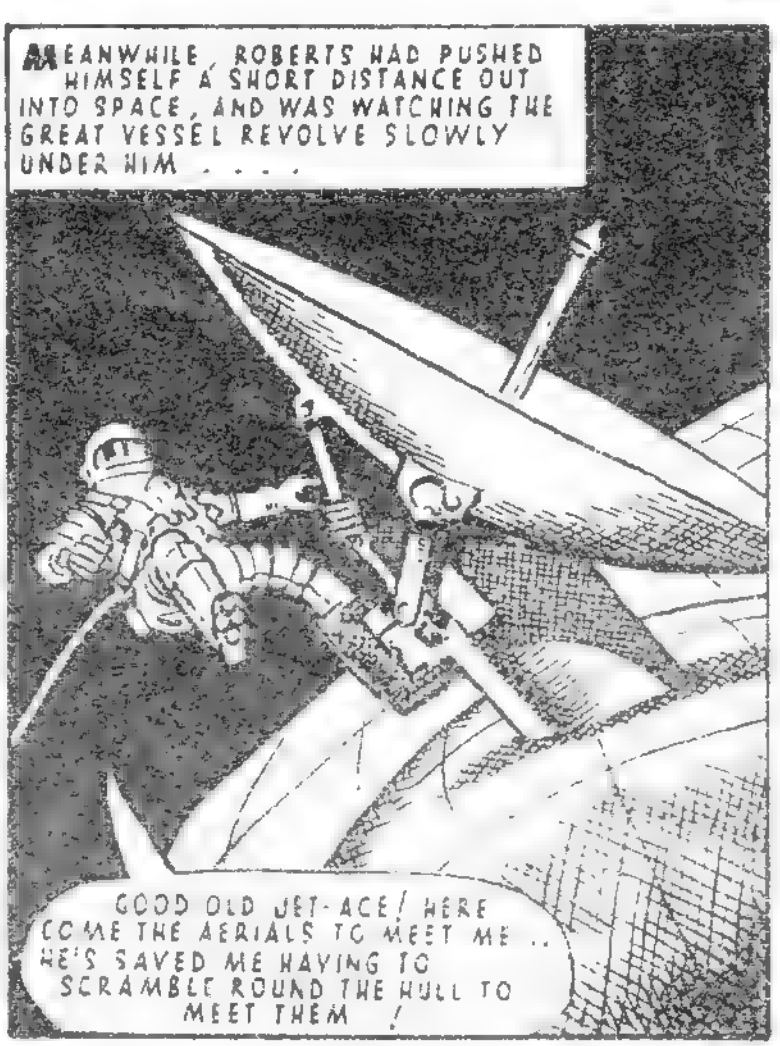
PLUMDUFF CHARTERIS, SO NICKNAMED BECAUSE OF HIS HEAVY BUILD, TRIED TRANSMITTING TO EARTH FOR SEVERAL SECONDS LONGER . THEN HE TRACED THE FAULT
STILL CAN'T CALL UP BASE, SIR! I CAN'T HOLD THE OUTSIDE AERIALS STEADY ON ONE BEAM . . . THEY KEEP SWIVELLING AS THOUGH ANSWERING CONTROLS OTHER THAN OUR OWN !
ROBERTS . . . GET YOUR SPACE-SUIT ON, AND TAKE A LOOK AT THE AERIALS OUTSIDE!

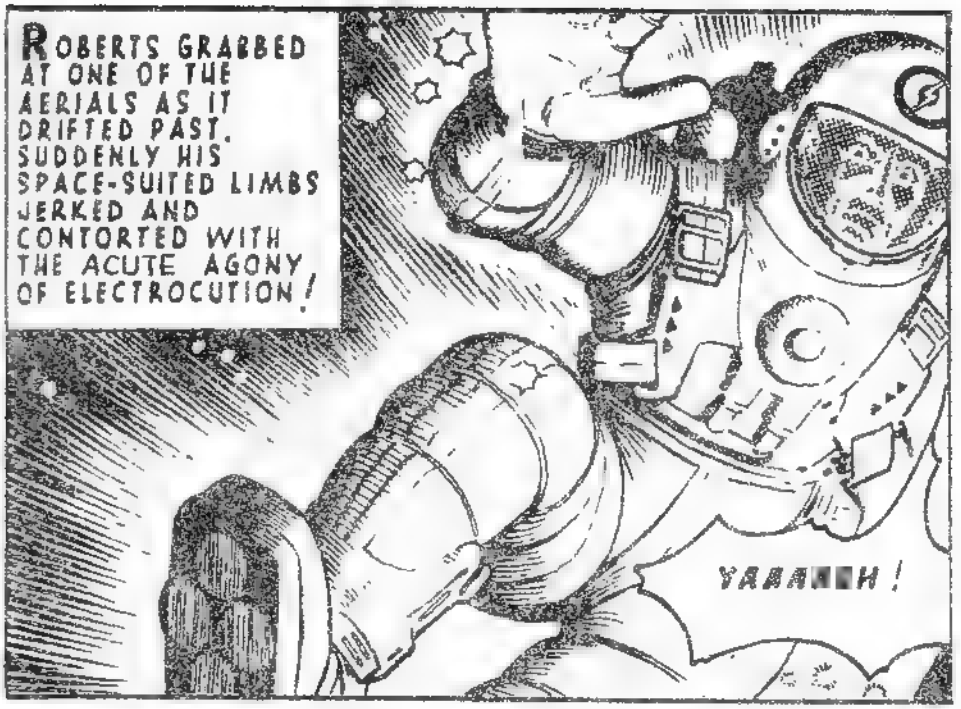

ROBERTS WAS A KEEN MAN, AND A GOOD TECHNICIAN, BUT HE ALWAYS SAVED HIMSELF HARD WORK WHENEVER HE COULD
DO ME A FAVOUR, JET-ACE! THOSE AERIALS ARE RIGHT ROUND THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SHIP TO THE AIR-LOCK ! SUPPOSING YOU ROLL THE SHIP HALF A TURN AS SOON AS I'M OUTSIDE, AND SAVE ME THE JOB OF CLIMBING ALL THAT WAY ROUND TO THEM !
I DOUBT IF OLD COBBY WILL APPROVE . . . BUT I'LL DO ANYTHING TO OBLIGE A FRIEND.


MORGAN HAD OVERHEARD THE CONVERSATION, BUT HE SEEMED TO PAY NO HEED
EXCUSE ME JET-ACE, JUST WANT TO TEST YOUR SERVO-ELECTRONIC SWITCHES. THERE WAS NOTHING MORE SERIOUS THAN A BLOWN FUSE DOWN THERE... BUT I JUST WANT TO TEST BEFORE I CLOSE UP THE UNIT !
OH...ER ..YES! SURE! HELP YOURSELF !

MORGAN MADE HIS TESTS AND WENT AWAY AGAIN. SHORTLY AFTER-WARDS JET-ACE SAW A LIGHT FLASH ON THE CONSOLE BEFORE HIM, AND HE KNEW THAT THE AIR-LOCK HAD CLOSED, AND THAT ROBERTS WAS OUTSIDE . . . .
AIR LOCK
...NOW A SHORT PAUSE TO ALLOW HIM TO PUSH HIMSELF CLEAR OF THE SHIP, AND ... FIRE ONE !

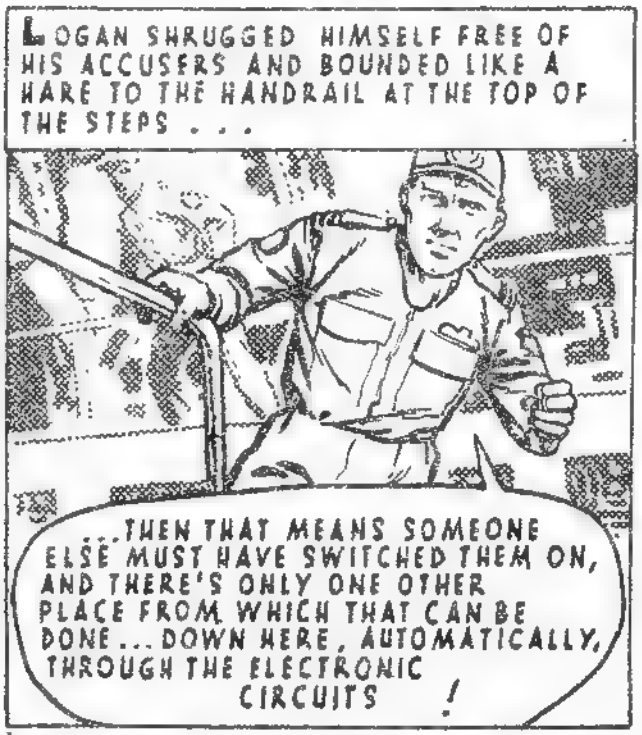

ONE OF THE SMALL STEERING ROCKETS SET HALFWAY ALONG THE HULL OF THE SHIP SPLUTTERED AND POKED OUT A THIN FINGER OF ORANGE FLAME
Z-4 BEGAN TO ROLL LAZILY, AND LOGAN CUT OFF THE POWER


MEANWHILE, ROBERTS HAD PUSHED HIMSELF A SHORT DISTANCE OUT INTO SPACE, AND WAS WATCHING THE GREAT VESSEL REVOLVE SLOWLY UNDER HIM . . . .
GOOD OLD JET-ACE! HERE COME THE AERIALS TO MEET ME .. HE'S SAVED ME HAVING TO SCRAMBLE ROUND THE HULL TO MEET THEM !

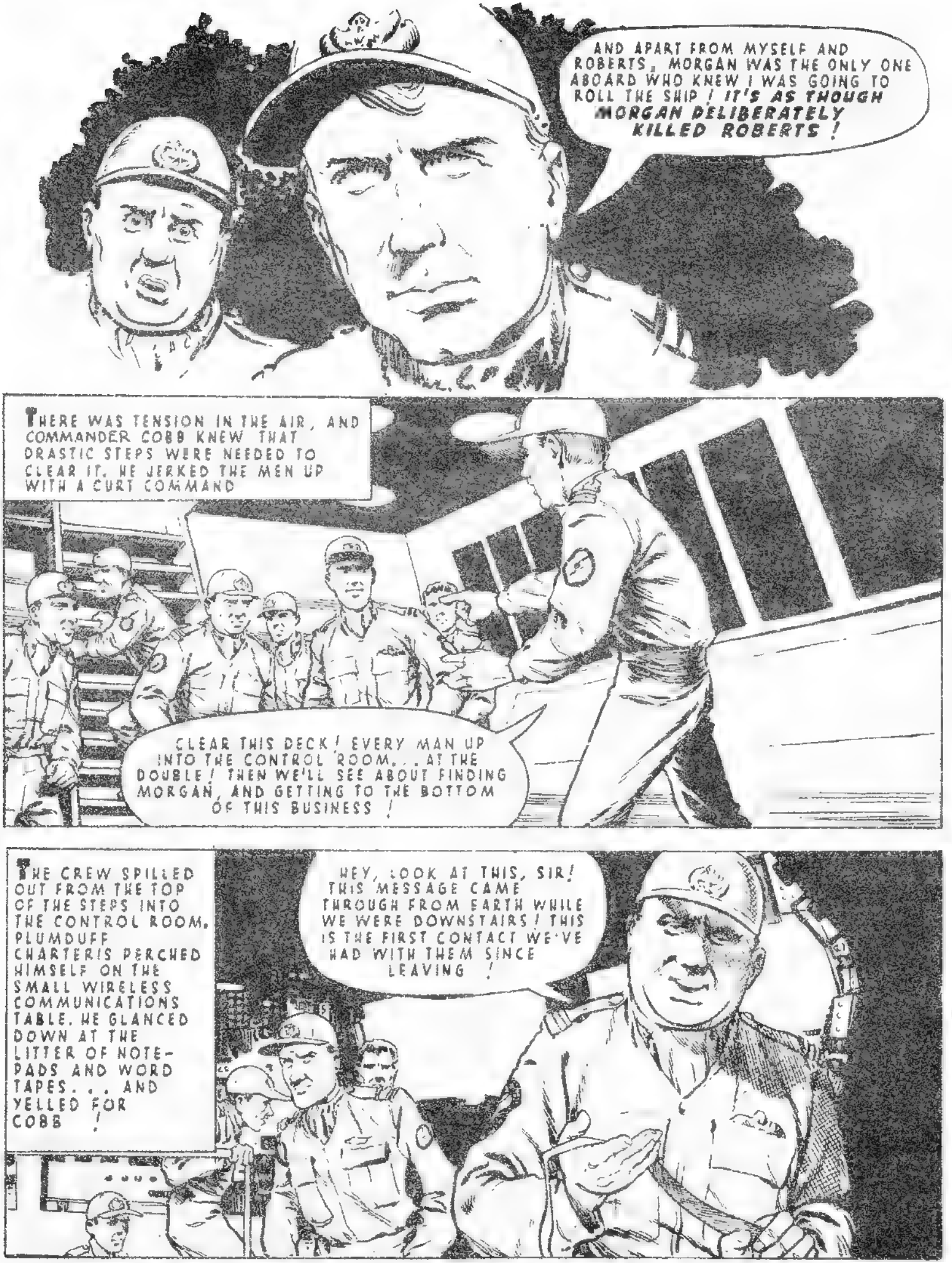

ROBERTS GRABBED AT ONE OF THE AERIALS AS IT DRIFTED PAST. SUDDENLY HIS SPACE-SUITED LIMBS JERKED AND CONTORTED WITH THE ACUTE AGONY OF ELECTROCUTION!
YAAAAAH!

WHO ROLLED THE SHIP?
LOGAN!
HE'S KILLED ROBERTS!

TAKE IT EASY... IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE WHETHER I ROLLED THE SHIP OR NOT. THOSE AERIALS WERE SWITCHED OFF... I SAW CHARTERIS CUT OUT THE SWITCHES!
THAT'S RIGHT, I DID!


LOGAN SHRUGGED HIMSELF FREE OF HIS ACCUSERS AND BOUNDED LIKE A HARE TO THE HANDRAIL AT THE TOP OF THE STEPS . . .
...THEN THAT MEANS SOMEONE ELSE MUST HAVE SWITCHED THEM ON, AND THERE'S ONLY ONE OTHER PLACE FROM WHICH THAT CAN BE DONE... DOWN HERE, AUTOMATICALLY, THROUGH THE ELECTRONIC CIRCUITS!

AERIALS
ON
OFF
THERE YOU ARE! SOMEONE'S FED INSTRUCTIONS INTO THESE ELECTRONIC COMPUTERS... AND THEY SWITCHED ON THE AERIALS!
MORGAN WAS DOWN HERE ALL THE WHILE... HE COULD HAVE DONE IT!


AND APART FROM MYSELF AND ROBERTS, MORGAN WAS THE ONLY ONE ABOARD WHO KNEW I WAS GOING TO ROLL THE SHIP! IT'S AS THOUGH MORGAN DELIBERATELY KILLED ROBERTS!
THERE WAS TENSION IN THE AIR, AND COMMANDER COBB KNEW THAT DRASTIC STEPS WERE NEEDED TO CLEAR IT. HE JERKED THE MEN UP WITH A CURT COMMAND
CLEAR THIS DECK! EVERY MAN UP INTO THE CONTROL ROOM... AT THE DOUBLE! THEN WE'LL SEE ABOUT FINDING MORGAN, AND GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS BUSINESS!
THE CREW SPILLED OUT FROM THE TOP OF THE STEPS INTO THE CONTROL ROOM. PLUMDUFF CHARTERIS PERCHED HIMSELF ON THE SMALL WIRELESS COMMUNICATIONS TABLE. HE GLANCED DOWN AT THE LITTER OF NOTE-PADS AND WORD TAPES... AND YELLED FOR COBB!
HEY, LOOK AT THIS, SIR! THIS MESSAGE CAME THROUGH FROM EARTH WHILE WE WERE DOWNSTAIRS! THIS IS THE FIRST CONTACT WE'VE HAD WITH THEM SINCE LEAVING!

PLUMDUFF RIPPED OFF THE TAPE AND READ IT ALOUD
HAVE RECEIVED YOUR SIGNALS. CONTINUE ON MISSION REGARDLESS OF MISHAP. CONTINUANCE OF MISSION TOP PRIORITY —CONTROL.
CHARTERIS SWITCHED ON, ADJUSTED A SMALL DIAL AND THE VOICE OF AN OPERATOR AT EARTH CONTROL FILLED THE ROOM . . .
CONTROL TO Z-4. WE ARE NOT HEARING FROM YOU. NO MESSAGE RECEIVED SINCE "LIFT-OFF". CONTROL TO Z-4. ANSWER PLEASE. NO MESSAGE RECEIVED SINCE... CLICK..
KEEP IT ON THE LINE PLUM!
CAN'T, JET-ACE. THE OUTSIDE AERIALS HAVE SWUNG OFF THE WAVELENGTH DIRECTION!
WELL, THAT SETTLES IT, WE GO ON! STAND-BY FOR TIME-SLIP! AND CHARTERIS, IT SEEMS AS THOUGH THOSE AERIALS ARE WORKING AGAIN. TRY TO CONTACT CONTROL AND ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR SIGNAL!
THE SHIP'S ULTIMATE DESTINATION WAS TO A FAR CORNER OF THE UNIVERSE, AND EVEN BY TRAVELLING AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT, IT WOULD TAKE THE SHIP MANY YEARS TO REACH JOURNEY'S END. THE NEXT STEP IN THE VOYAGE WAS TO TRANSFER THE MOTION OF THE SHIP INTO A SERIES OF "TIME SLIPS" AND ACCOMPLISH THE SAME JOURNEY IN A MATTER OF DAYS . . .
WELL, WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THAT? FIRST THEY SAY THEY'VE PICKED UP ALL OUR MESSAGES... THEN THEY SAY THEY HAVEN'T! ARE THEY CRAZY, OR ARE WE?
ALL THE SAME, WE'RE CONTINUING ON OUR MISSION, STAND BY! WE ENTER TIME-SLIP IN FIFTEEN MINUTES FROM NOW!

THE SHIP EMERGED FROM ITS FIRST "HOP" THROUGH TIME, AND IT NOW HAD TO BE MANOEUVRED IN SPACE TO BE IN THE CORRECT POSITION FOR THE SECOND OF A SERIES OF SIMILAR "JUMPS"

ALL ROCKETS FIRING!

ALL CONTROLS SET AND LOCKED!

THEN IF THE COURSE HAS BEEN PLOTTED CORRECTLY, WE'LL ARRIVE AT OUR NEXT JUMP-OFF POINT WITHOUT FURTHER TROUBLE... AND TALKING OF TROUBLE, LET'S SPLIT UP AND START SEARCHING THE SHIP FOR MORGAN!

COBB, LOGAN AND CHARTERIS, TOGETHER WITH THE FOUR OTHER CREW MEMBERS, EACH TOOK SEPARATE SECTIONS OF THE SHIP AND BEGAN A THOROUGH SEARCH...

THERE'S SOMEONE AROUND THAT NEXT CORNER... IT MUST BE MORGAN! WHAT'S HE DOING LURKING IN THIS PART OF THE SHIP?

JET-ACE EXPECTED TO BE THE ONE GIVING THE SURPRISE, BUT INSTEAD IT WAS HE WHO RECEIVED THE SHOCK!

LOGAN! I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU! NOW — I'M GOING TO SHOOT YOU!

JET-ACE HAD BEEN CAUGHT OFF GUARD, BUT HE SOON RECOVERED - AND WENT INTO ACTION

YOU WERE LOOKING FOR ME... AND YOU'VE FOUND ME! NOW WATCH THE FUN!

THE TWO HIT THE BULKHEAD WITH AN ECHOING CLATTER. THEY BOUNCED TO THE FLOOR, AND BEGAN SLAMMING EACH OTHER WITH THEIR FISTS . . . .

WITH HIS BACK AGAINST A WALL, MORGAN PUSHED HIMSELF PARTIALLY TO HIS FEET. THEN HE JABBED AT JET-ACE WITH THE BUTT END OF THE GUN...

O.K., LOGAN, SO YOU FOUND HIM! BUT YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO BEAT HIM TO DEATH AS WELL!

BEAT *HIM* TO DEATH! HE CAME AT ME WITH A GUN! WE KNOW THERE'S A KILLER AMONG US ON THIS SHIP . . . AND I DECIDED TO TAKE NO CHANCES!

JET-ACE KNEW HE WAS IN THE RIGHT, BUT MORGAN CAME BACK WITH A FIERCE RETORT —

IF THERE'S A KILLER ON THIS SHIP, IT'S LOGAN ! I WAS CHECKING THE SERVO-WIRING NEAR THIS WEAPON RACK, WHEN LOGAN ROLLS THE SHIP... THROWS ME OFF BALANCE AND KNOCKS ME OUT ! I RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS JUST AS THE SHIP CAME OUT OF TIME-SLIP!

YOU MUST HAVE BEEN KNOCKED OUT AT THE SAME TIME AS ROBERTS WAS ELECTROCUTED BY THE AERIALS !

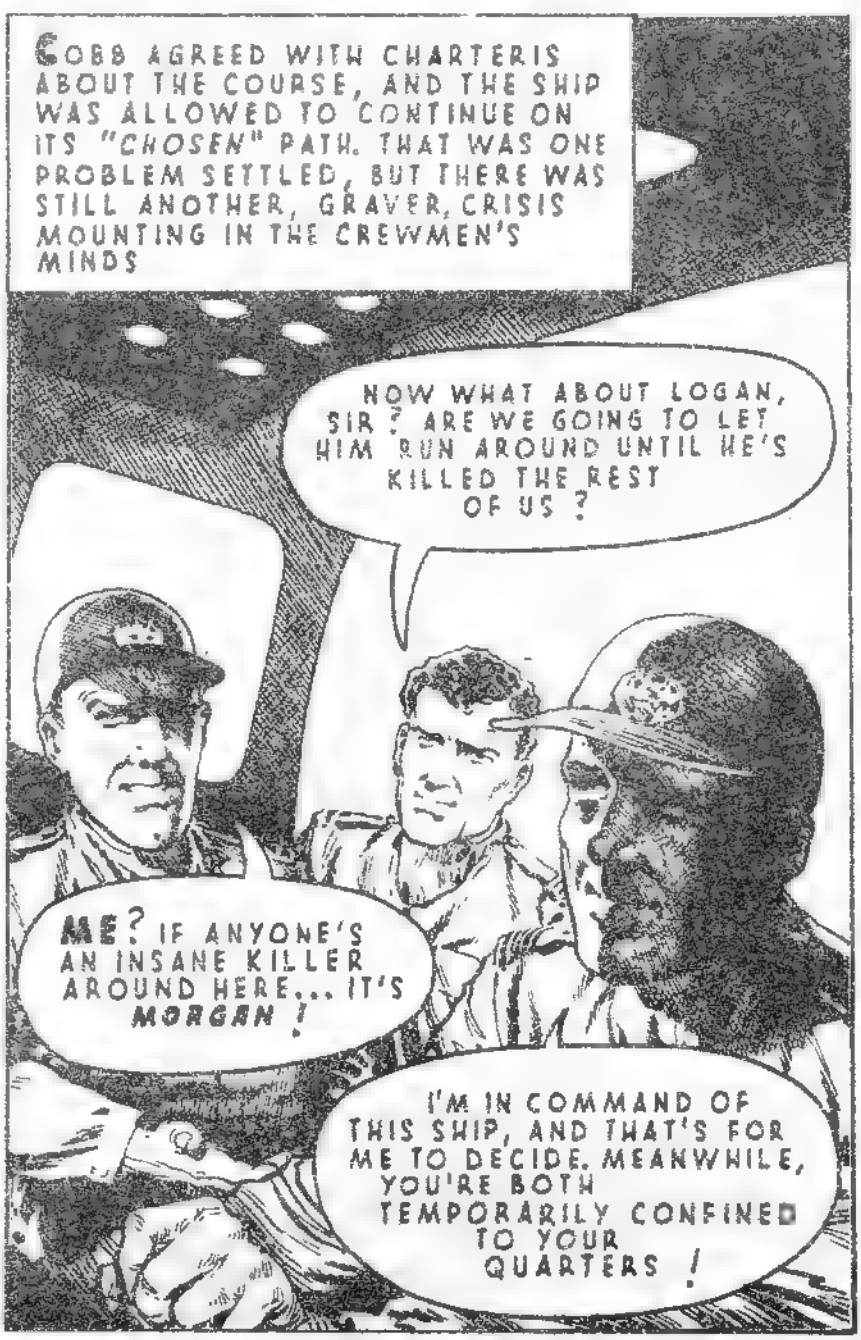
IF YOUR STORY IS TRUE, HOW DID YOU HAPPEN TO HAVE A GUN IN YOUR HAND JUST AS I CAME ALONG ?

BECAUSE I FELL AGAINST THE WEAPON RACK AND KNOCKED THIS RIFLE LOOSE WHEN YOU ROLLED THE SHIP. I WAS JUST PUTTING THE GUN BACK IN PLACE WHEN YOU APPEARED !

TEMPERS WERE RUNNING HIGH. BOTH MEN COULD HAVE BEEN TELLING THE TRUTH, BUT SUDDENLY THE QUARREL WAS ENDED... BY THE CRAZY MOTION OF THE SHIP, JERKING THEIR FEET FROM UNDER THEM

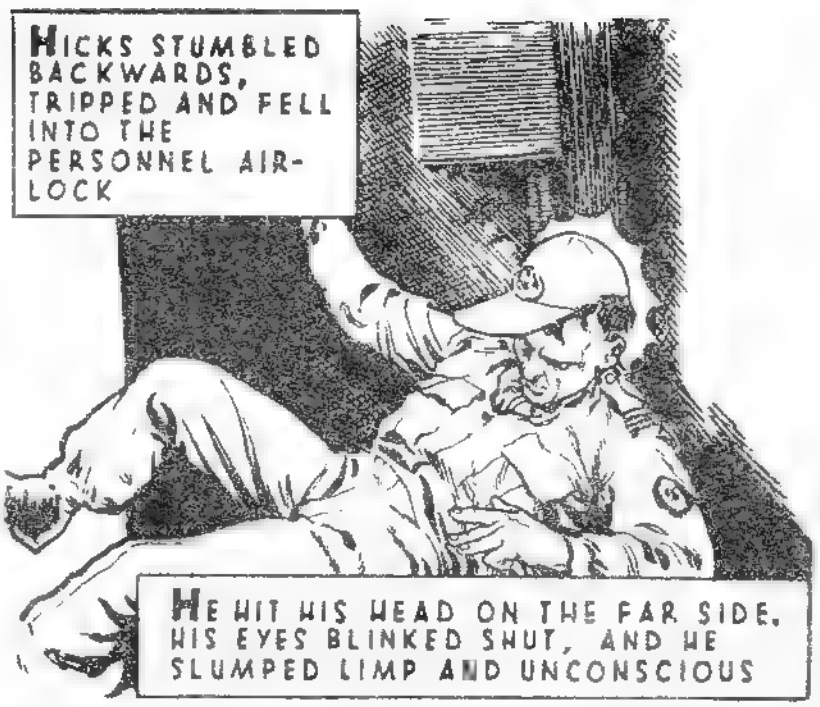
THE MEN GRUNTED AND YELLED AS THEY STRUGGLED TO UNTANGLE THEMSELVES — COBB WAS THE FIRST TO KICK HIMSELF FREE . . .
WHO'S DOUBLED BACK INTO THE CONTROL ROOM AND ALTERED COURSE WITHOUT MY ORDERS ?
NO-ONE, COBBY! WE'RE ALL HERE . . . ALL EIGHT OF US! THE SHIP'S STARTED STEERING HERSELF !

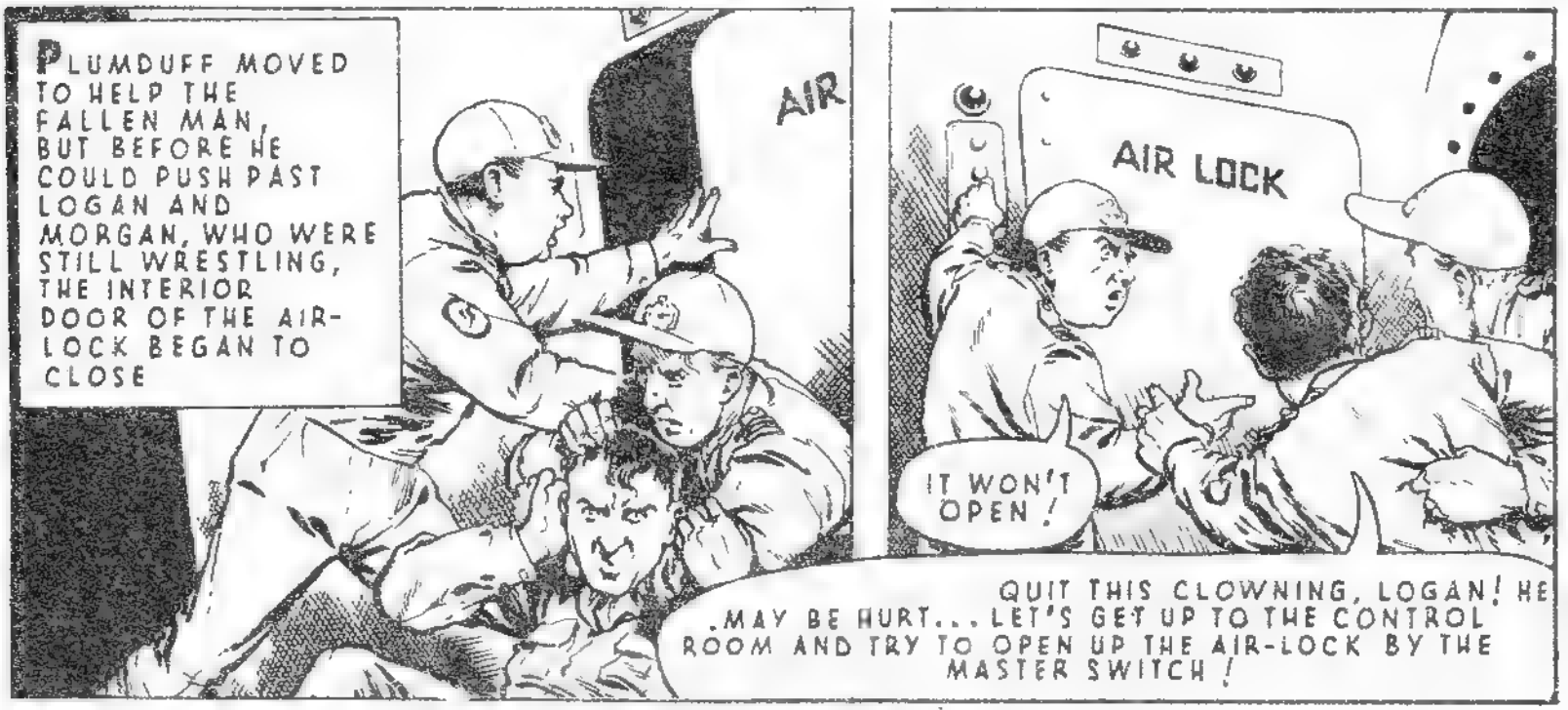
JET-ACE MADE A QUICK BUT THOROUGH INSPECTION OF THE PILOT'S DIALS AND FOUND THEM AS THEY SHOULD BE. THIS DONE, HE LEANED OVER HIS FRIEND'S SHOULDER AND WATCHED THE CALCULATIONS BEING FIGURED ON THE COURSE
THIS IS AMAZING! THE SHIP'S NOW GOING TO OUR PLANNED DESTINATION — BUT ON A SIMPLER AND MORE DIRECT COURSE! IT WOULD HAVE TAKEN A FLASH OF MATHEMATICAL BRILLIANCE FOR ME TO HAVE FOUND THIS ROUTE
BUT THE SHIP HAD HIT UPON IT, APPARENTLY OF ITS OWN ACCORD !


COBB AGREED WITH CHARTERIS ABOUT THE COURSE, AND THE SHIP WAS ALLOWED TO CONTINUE ON ITS "CHOSEN" PATH. THAT WAS ONE PROBLEM SETTLED, BUT THERE WAS STILL ANOTHER, GRAVER, CRISIS MOUNTING IN THE CREWMEN'S MINDS
NOW WHAT ABOUT LOGAN, SIR? ARE WE GOING TO LET HIM RUN AROUND UNTIL HE'S KILLED THE REST OF US?
ME? IF ANYONE'S AN INSANE KILLER AROUND HERE... IT'S MORGAN!
I'M IN COMMAND OF THIS SHIP, AND THAT'S FOR ME TO DECIDE. MEANWHILE, YOU'RE BOTH TEMPORARILY CONFINED TO YOUR QUARTERS!

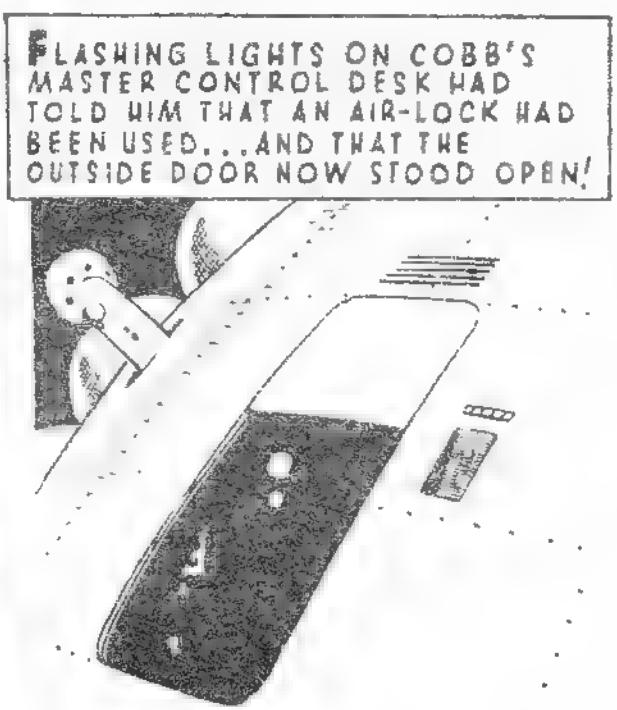
BOTH MEN SULLENLY OBEYED THE ORDER, AND LOGAN WAS STILL GRUMBLING TO HIMSELF WHEN CHARTERIS BROUGHT IN HIS FOOD
ENJOYING THE REST, JET-ACE ?
NO I'M NOT! IT GIVES ME THE JITTERS TO THINK THAT THE NEXT TIME MORGAN HAS ONE OF HIS BRAIN-STORMS HE CAN JUST OPEN HIS CABIN DOOR AND GO OUT HUNTING FOR ONE OF YOU GUYS !
HE OUGHT TO BE SAFELY LOCKED UP, AND IF COBB WON'T DO IT . . . WE SHOULD! COME ON, PLUMDUFF !
BUT, JET-ACE, YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE CONFINED TO YOUR CABIN !
JET-ACE WAS NOT LISTENING. THIS DECISION HAD BEEN BOILING IN HIS MIND TOO LONG FOR HIM TO COOL IT OFF NOW
YOU SAID I WASN'T TO LEAVE MY CABIN...WELL, MORGAN'S LEFT HIS !
JET-ACE TOOK MORGAN IN A FLYING LEAP . . .
HEY!
BUT MORGAN WAS NO EASY CATCH... HE FOUGHT BACK WITH FRANTIC DETERMINATION...
OOOPH!
HOW COME THIS CRACK-POT'S OUT OF HIS CABIN AND WANDERING AROUND THE SHIP ?
I COULD ASK YOU THE SAME THING, LOGAN! MORGAN'S OUT ON COBB'S ORDERS. HE'S GOING TO THE CONTROL ROOM TO MAKE A REPORT! NOW LET HIM GO!
BUT JET-ACE SOON HELD MORGAN, AND THEN TURNED TO HIS COMPANION, A MAN NAMED HICKS . . .
LAY OFF ME, WILL YOU, LOGAN!

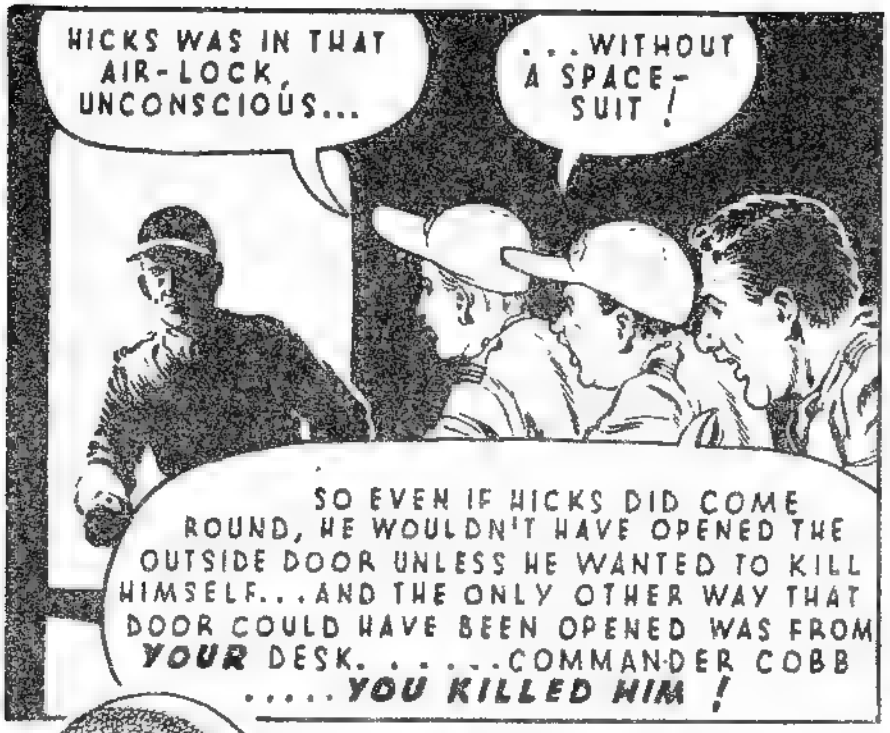
WE'VE DECIDED TO DO BETTER THAN THAT. . . WE'RE GOING TO LOCK HIM SOMEWHERE RIGHT OUT OF HARM'S WAY! AND YOU'RE NOT STOPPING US!
UUH!


HICKS STUMBLED BACKWARDS, TRIPPED AND FELL INTO THE PERSONNEL AIR-LOCK
HE HIT HIS HEAD ON THE FAR SIDE. HIS EYES BLINKED SHUT, AND HE SLUMPED LIMP AND UNCONSCIOUS

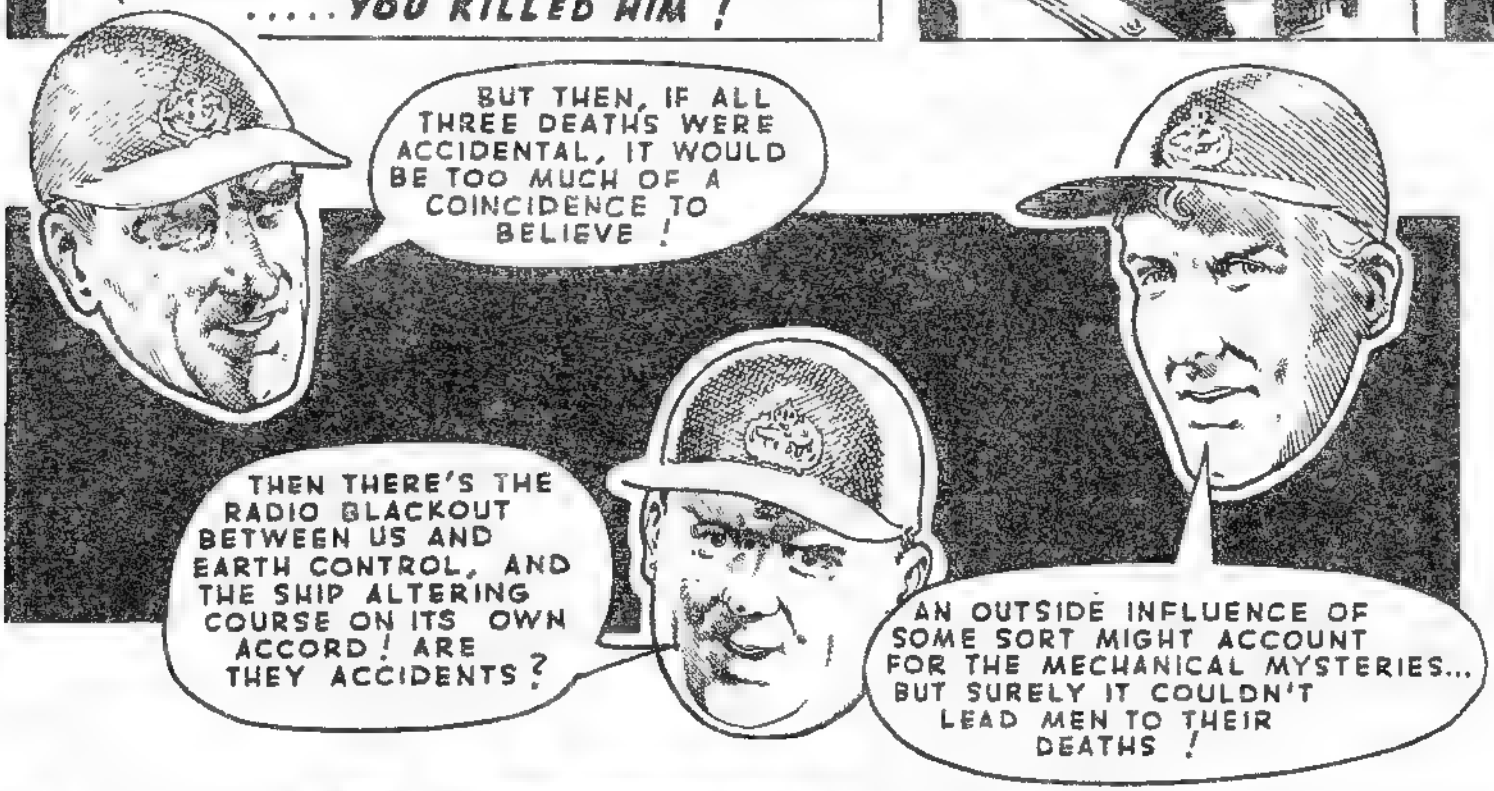

PLUMDUFF MOVED TO HELP THE FALLEN MAN, BUT BEFORE HE COULD PUSH PAST LOGAN AND MORGAN, WHO WERE STILL WRESTLING, THE INTERIOR DOOR OF THE AIR-LOCK BEGAN TO CLOSE
AIR
AIR LOCK
IT WON'T OPEN!
QUIT THIS CLOWNING, LOGAN! HE MAY BE HURT... LET'S GET UP TO THE CONTROL ROOM AND TRY TO OPEN UP THE AIR-LOCK BY THE MASTER SWITCH!

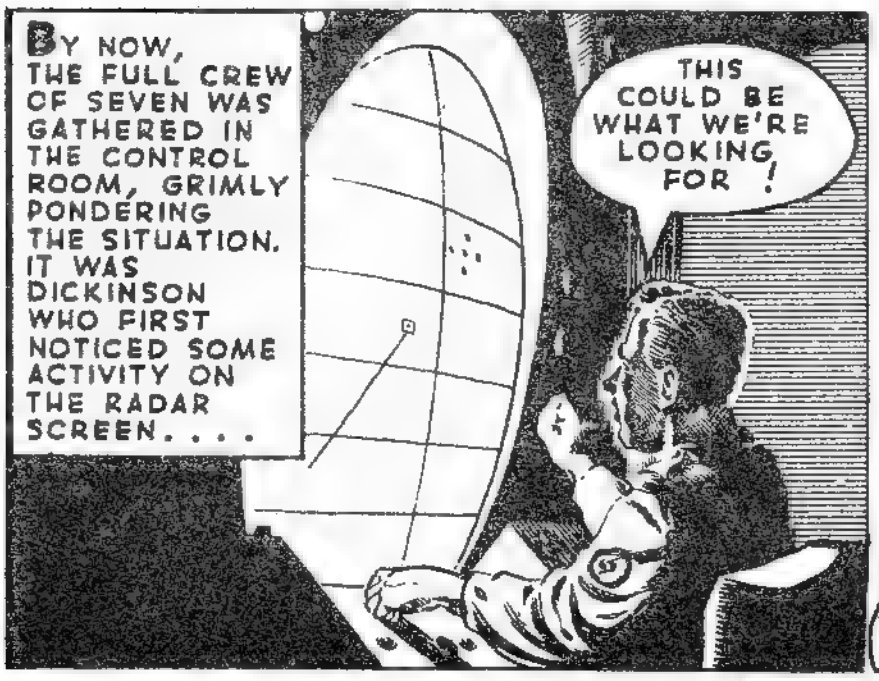
THE TRIO MOVED FAST, AND ARRIVED AT THE DOOR TO THE CONTROL ROOM JUST AS COBB WAS STORMING OUT!
WHO'S OPENED THE PERSONNEL AIR-LOCK AND GONE OUTSIDE?
GONE OUTSIDE?

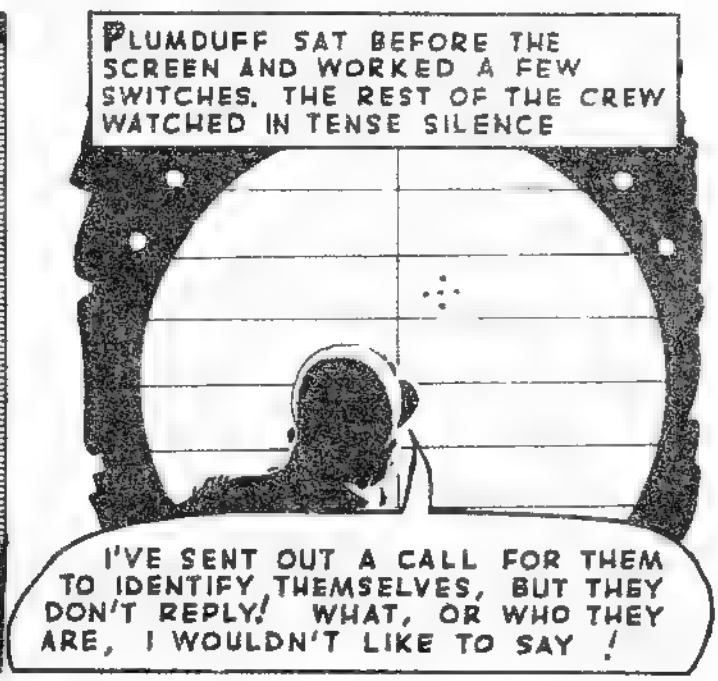

FLASHING LIGHTS ON COBB'S MASTER CONTROL DESK HAD TOLD HIM THAT AN AIR-LOCK HAD BEEN USED...AND THAT THE OUTSIDE DOOR NOW STOOD OPEN!

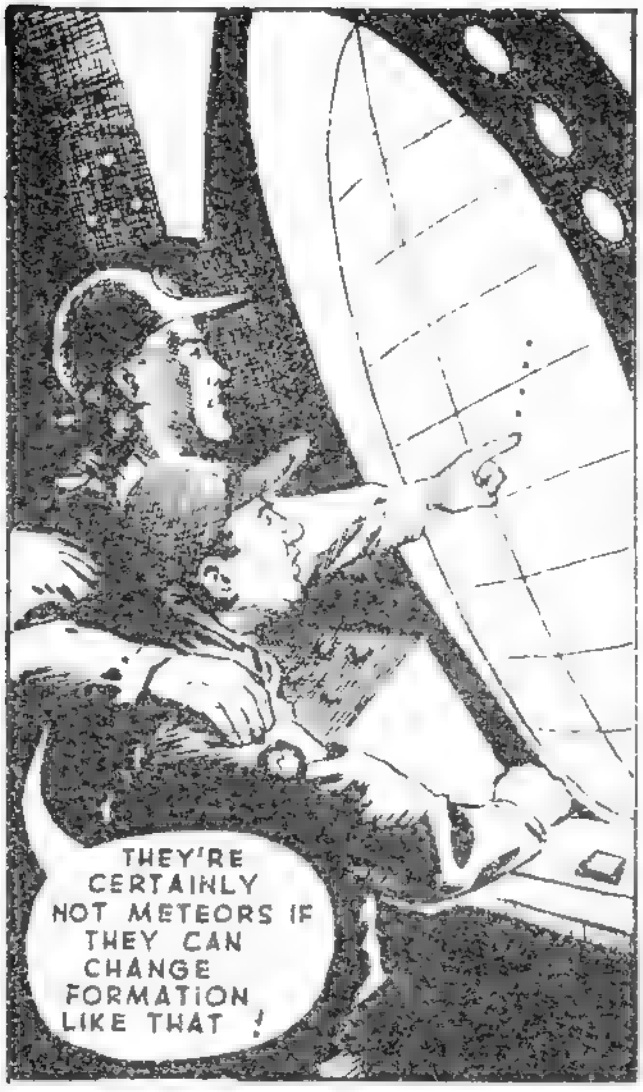

HICKS WAS IN THAT AIR-LOCK, UNCONSCIOUS...
...WITHOUT A SPACE-SUIT!
SO EVEN IF HICKS DID COME ROUND, HE WOULDN'T HAVE OPENED THE OUTSIDE DOOR UNLESS HE WANTED TO KILL HIMSELF...AND THE ONLY OTHER WAY THAT DOOR COULD HAVE BEEN OPENED WAS FROM YOUR DESK.....COMMANDER COBB .....YOU KILLED HIM!

TAKE IT EASY, FELLERS, AND THINK! FIRST WE FOUND PROOF THAT MORGAN WAS THE KILLER...THEN HE PROVED IT WAS LOGAN...NOW YOU'RE ALL SURE IT IS ME! IT CAN'T BE ALL OF US!

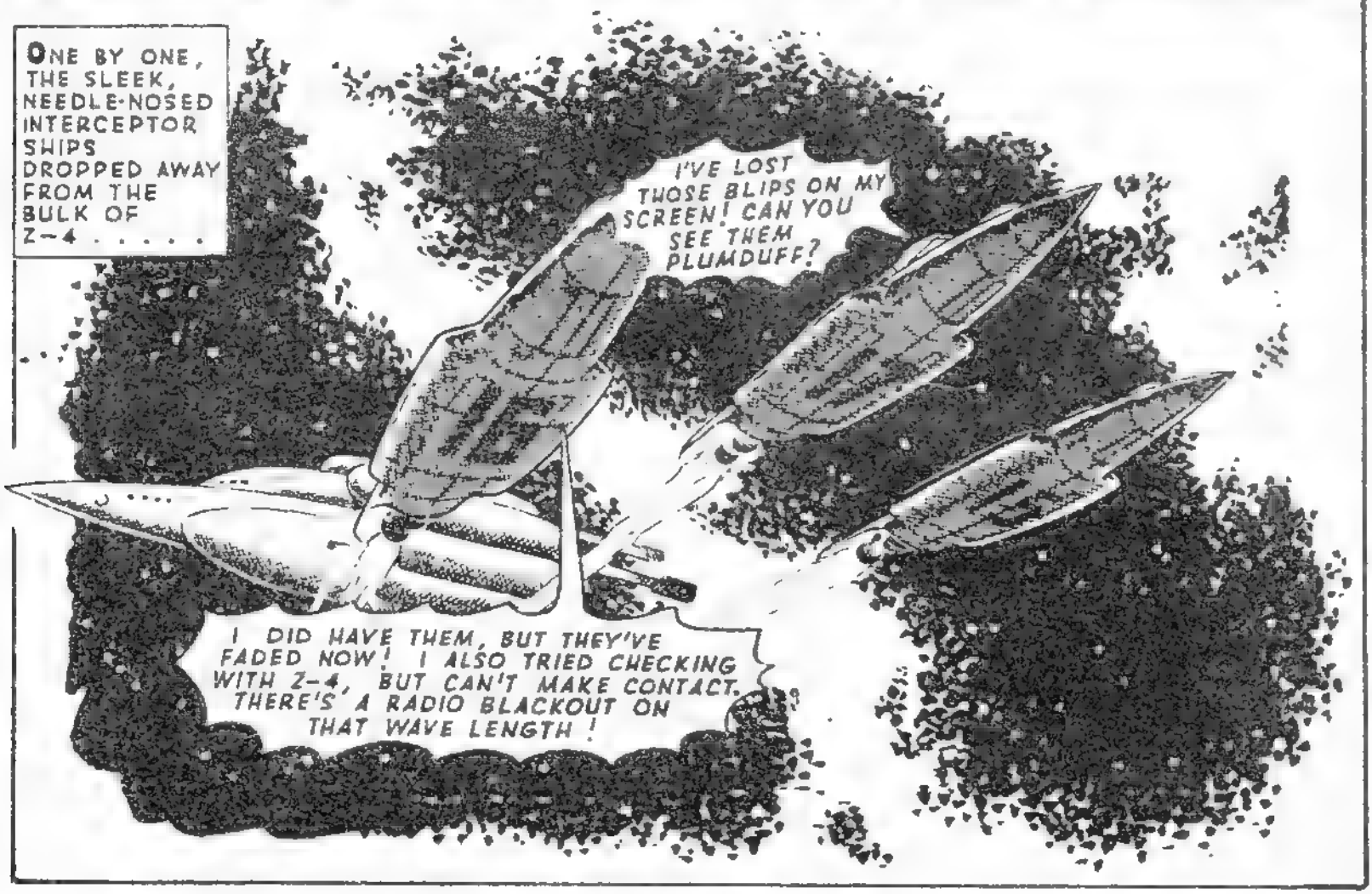

BUT THEN, IF ALL THREE DEATHS WERE ACCIDENTAL, IT WOULD BE TOO MUCH OF A COINCIDENCE TO BELIEVE!
THEN THERE'S THE RADIO BLACKOUT BETWEEN US AND EARTH CONTROL, AND THE SHIP ALTERING COURSE ON ITS OWN ACCORD! ARE THEY ACCIDENTS?
AN OUTSIDE INFLUENCE OF SOME SORT MIGHT ACCOUNT FOR THE MECHANICAL MYSTERIES... BUT SURELY IT COULDN'T LEAD MEN TO THEIR DEATHS!

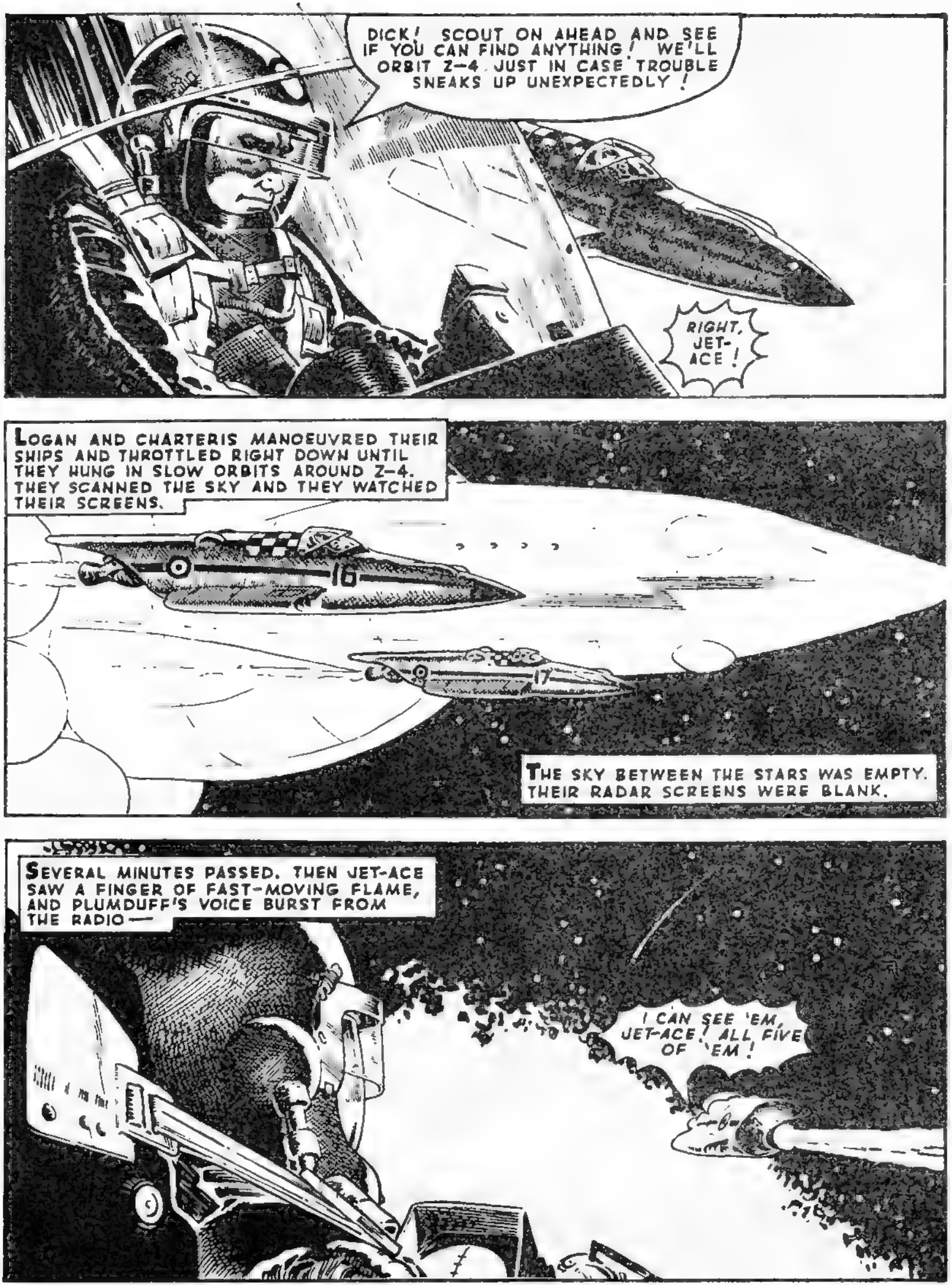

BY NOW, THE FULL CREW OF SEVEN WAS GATHERED IN THE CONTROL ROOM, GRIMLY PONDERING THE SITUATION. IT WAS DICKINSON WHO FIRST NOTICED SOME ACTIVITY ON THE RADAR SCREEN....
THIS COULD BE WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR!

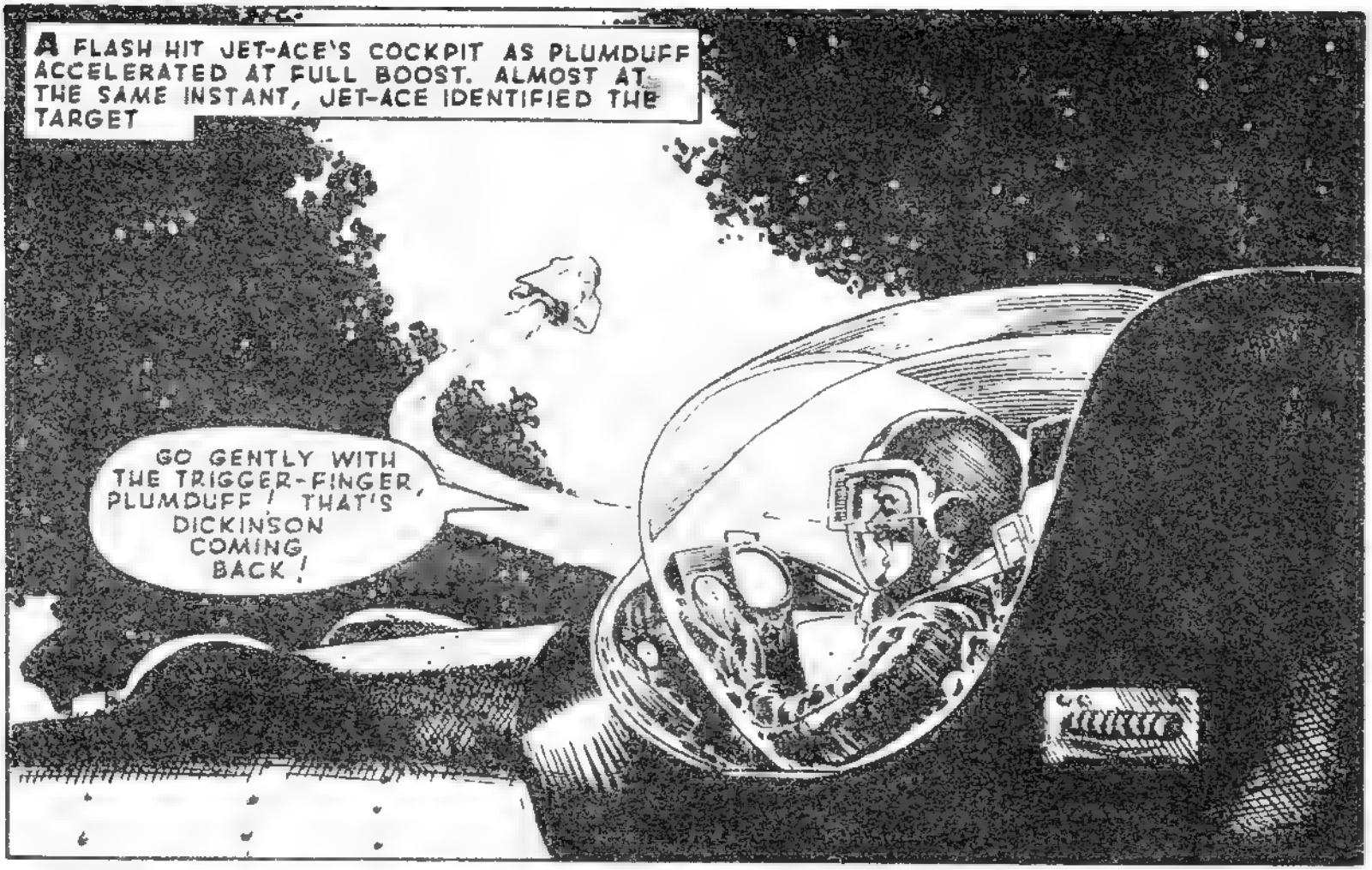

PLUMDUFF SAT BEFORE THE SCREEN AND WORKED A FEW SWITCHES. THE REST OF THE CREW WATCHED IN TENSE SILENCE
I'VE SENT OUT A CALL FOR THEM TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES, BUT THEY DON'T REPLY! WHAT, OR WHO THEY ARE, I WOULDN'T LIKE TO SAY!

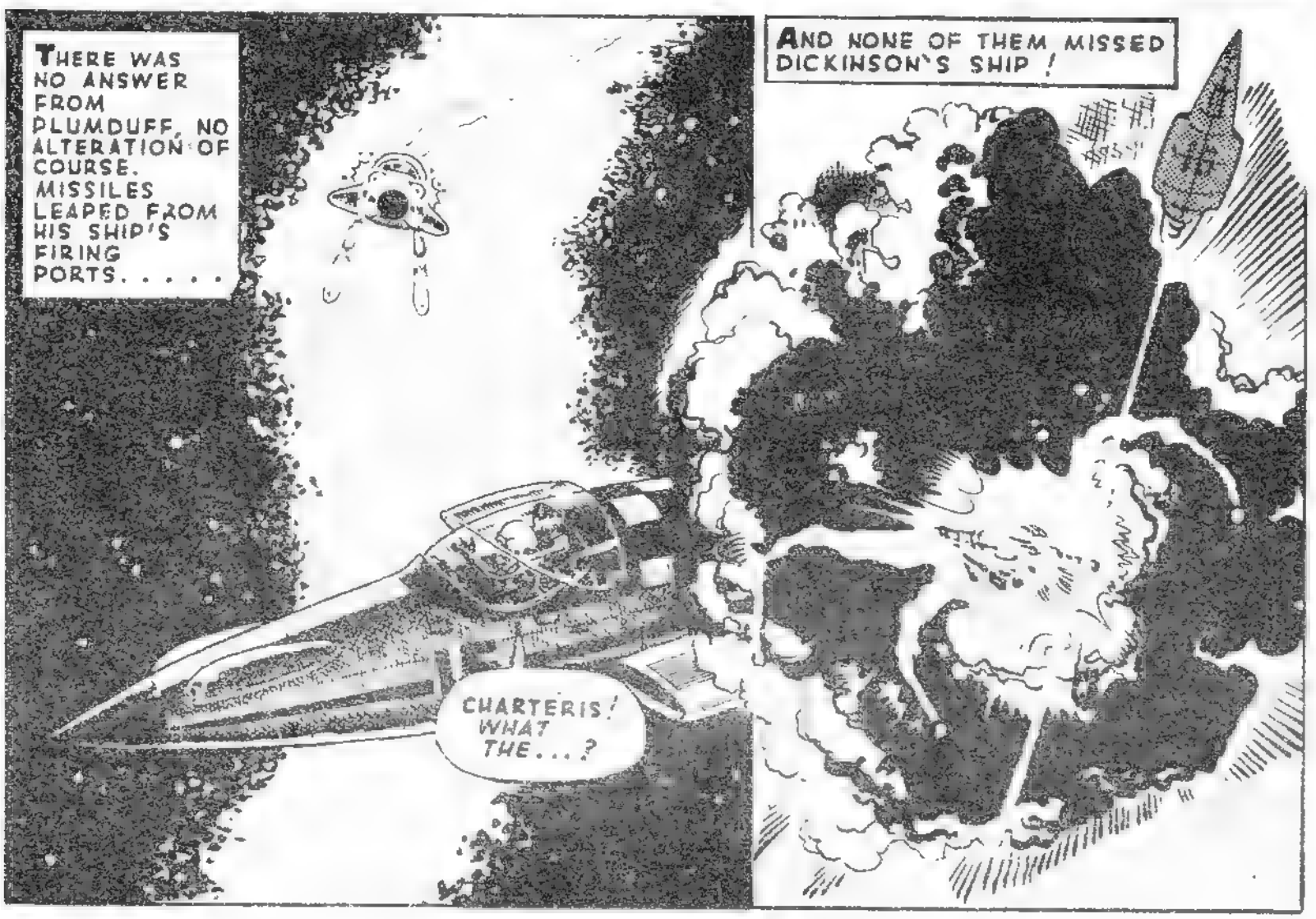

THEY'RE CERTAINLY NOT METEORS IF THEY CAN CHANGE FORMATION LIKE THAT !

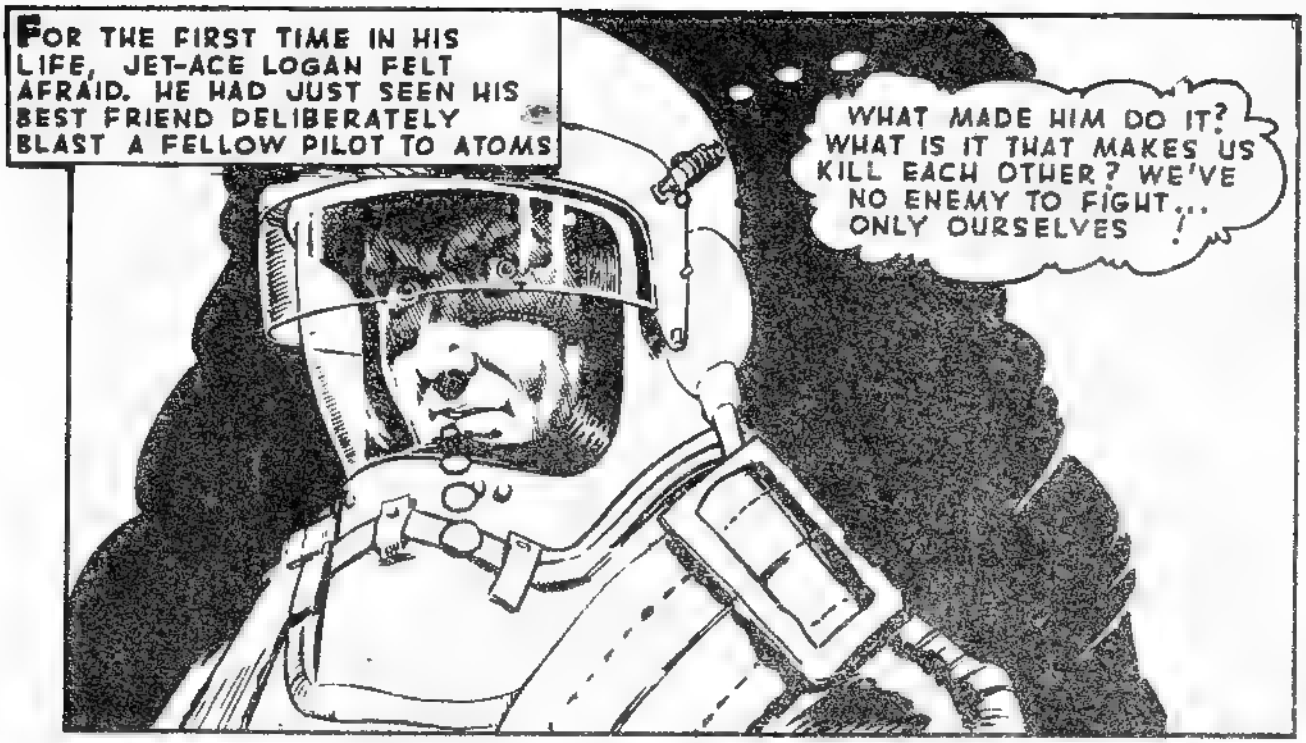
Z-4 WAS NEARING THE ZONE IT HAD BEEN SENT TO INVESTIGATE, AND AT LAST IT SEEMED AS THOUGH THE MEN ABOARD HER WOULD HAVE A TANGIBLE FOE TO COMBAT
LOGAN...CHARTERIS... DICKINSON... TAKE YOUR INTERCEPTOR SHIPS AND APPROACH NEAR ENOUGH TO THOSE OBJECTS TO ENABLE RECOGNITION!
YES, SIR!

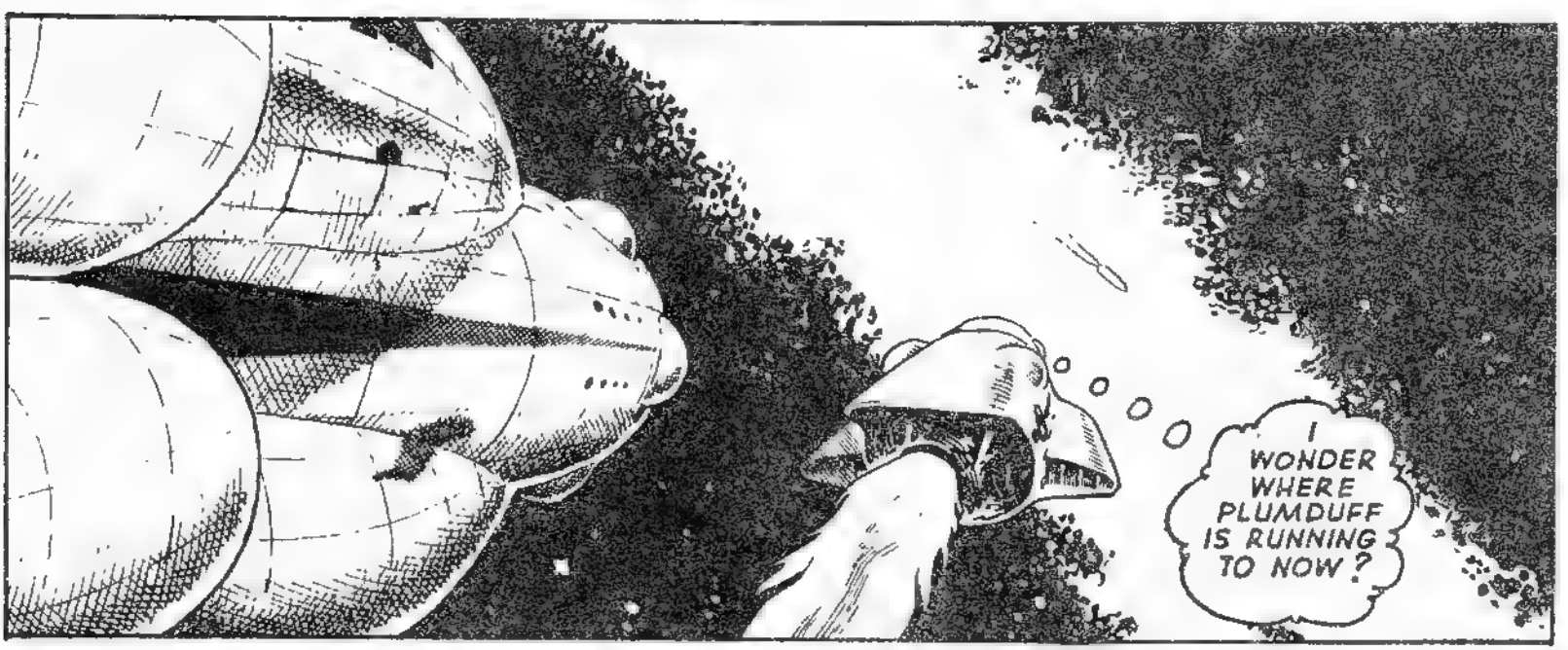

ONE BY ONE, THE SLEEK, NEEDLE-NOSED INTERCEPTOR SHIPS DROPPED AWAY FROM THE BULK OF Z-4 . . . . .
I'VE LOST THOSE BLIPS ON MY SCREEN! CAN YOU SEE THEM PLUMDUFF?
I DID HAVE THEM, BUT THEY'VE FADED NOW! I ALSO TRIED CHECKING WITH Z-4, BUT CAN'T MAKE CONTACT. THERE'S A RADIO BLACKOUT ON THAT WAVE LENGTH!

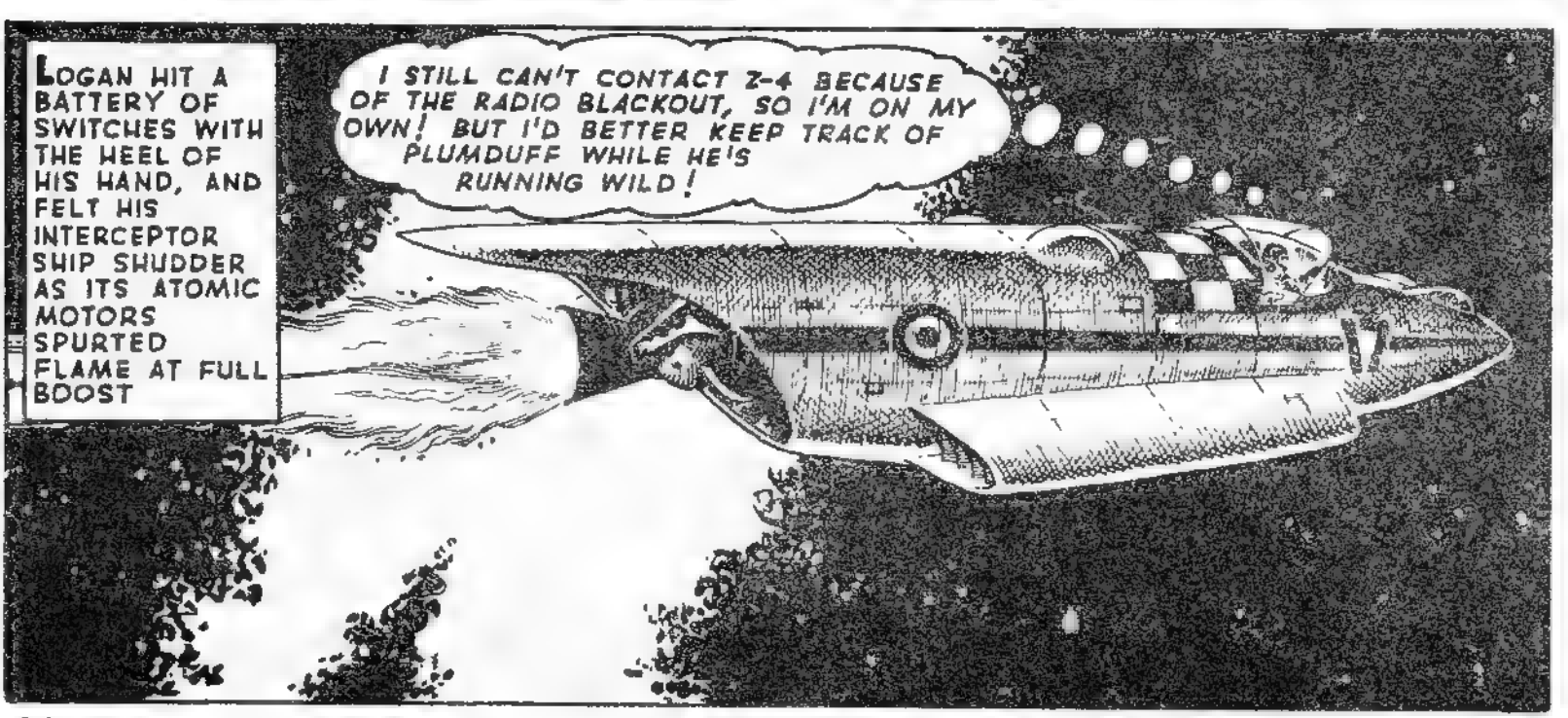

DICK! SCOUT ON AHEAD AND SEE IF YOU CAN FIND ANYTHING! WE'LL ORBIT Z-4 JUST IN CASE TROUBLE SNEAKS UP UNEXPECTEDLY!
RIGHT, JET-ACE!
LOGAN AND CHARTERIS MANOEUVRED THEIR SHIPS AND THROTTLED RIGHT DOWN UNTIL THEY HUNG IN SLOW ORBITS AROUND Z-4. THEY SCANNED THE SKY AND THEY WATCHED THEIR SCREENS.
16
17
THE SKY BETWEEN THE STARS WAS EMPTY. THEIR RADAR SCREENS WERE BLANK.
SEVERAL MINUTES PASSED. THEN JET-ACE SAW A FINGER OF FAST-MOVING FLAME, AND PLUMDUFF'S VOICE BURST FROM THE RADIO—
I CAN SEE 'EM, JET-ACE! ALL FIVE OF 'EM!


A FLASH HIT JET-ACE'S COCKPIT AS PLUMDUFF ACCELERATED AT FULL BOOST. ALMOST AT THE SAME INSTANT, JET-ACE IDENTIFIED THE TARGET
GO GENTLY WITH THE TRIGGER-FINGER, PLUMDUFF! THAT'S DICKINSON COMING BACK!


THERE WAS NO ANSWER FROM PLUMDUFF, NO ALTERATION OF COURSE. MISSILES LEAPED FROM HIS SHIP'S FIRING PORTS.....
CHARTERIS! WHAT THE...?
AND NONE OF THEM MISSED DICKINSON'S SHIP!

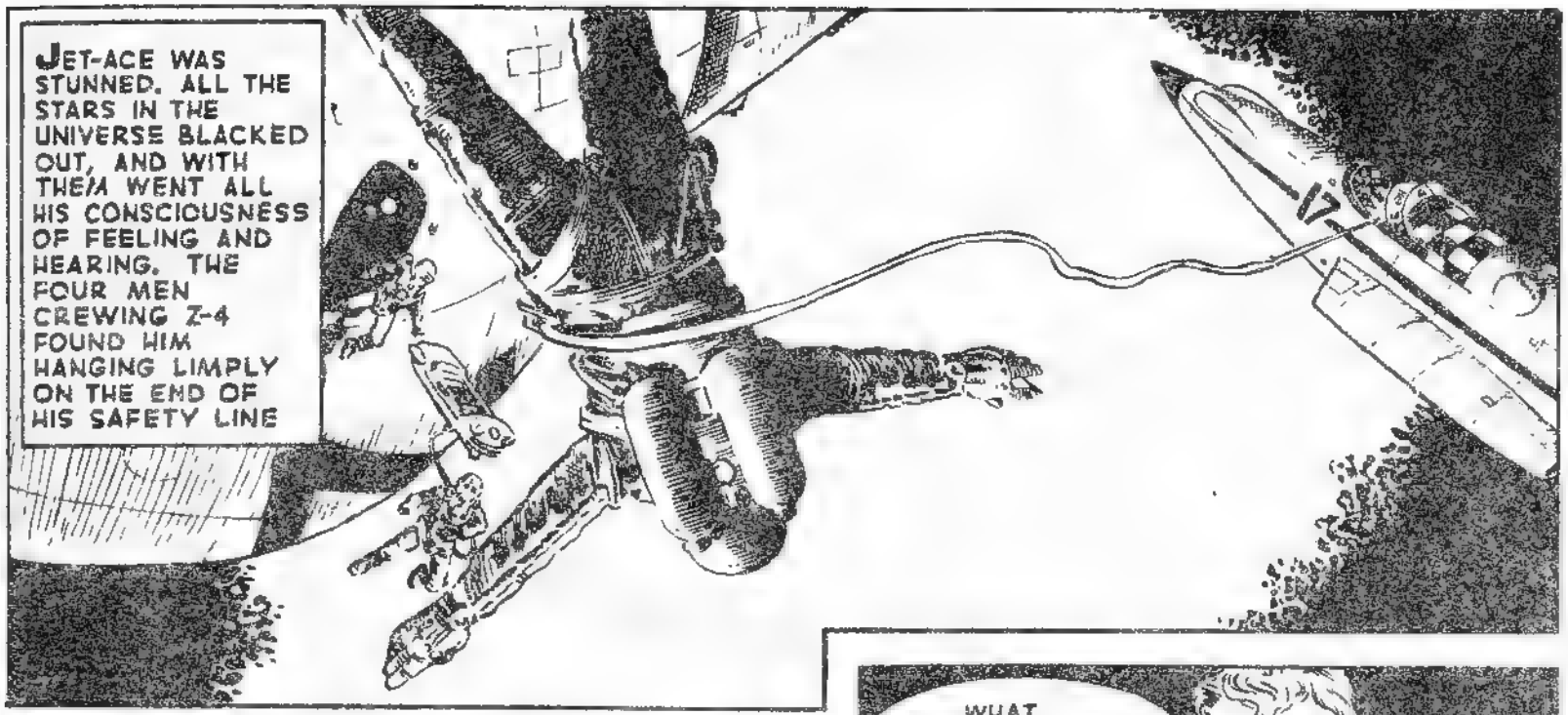

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE, JET-ACE LOGAN FELT AFRAID. HE HAD JUST SEEN HIS BEST FRIEND DELIBERATELY BLAST A FELLOW PILOT TO ATOMS
WHAT MADE HIM DO IT? WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES US KILL EACH OTHER? WE'VE NO ENEMY TO FIGHT... ONLY OURSELVES !


I WONDER WHERE PLUMDUFF IS RUNNING TO NOW?


LOGAN HIT A BATTERY OF SWITCHES WITH THE HEEL OF HIS HAND, AND FELT HIS INTERCEPTOR SHIP SHUDDER AS ITS ATOMIC MOTORS SPURTED FLAME AT FULL BOOST
I STILL CAN'T CONTACT Z-4 BECAUSE OF THE RADIO BLACKOUT, SO I'M ON MY OWN! BUT I'D BETTER KEEP TRACK OF PLUMDUFF WHILE HE'S RUNNING WILD!

JET-ACE'S RADAR PICKED UP PLUMDUFF'S SHIP. THEN ANOTHER OBJECT GREW FROM AN INDISTINCT BLOB INTO SHARP FOCUS
HE'S FOUND ANOTHER SPACE-SHIP! IF HE'S GOING TO ATTACK IT... HOW DID HE KNOW IT WAS THERE? I'VE ONLY JUST BEEN ABLE TO SEE IT !
BUT CHARTERIS DID NOT ATTACK. INSTEAD, HE SLOWED, AND MATCHED ORBITS WITH THE LARGER VESSEL. AS LOGAN DREW NEAR ENOUGH TO SEE WITH HIS OWN EYES, THE NEXT STAGE OF THIS MYSTIFYING INCIDENT BEGAN...
JET-ACE COULD NOT FIRE, FOR FEAR OF HITTING PLUMDUFF. HE COULD ONLY WATCH. . . . .
PLUMDUFF! CAN YOU HEAR ME? CAN YOU HEAR ME?
THEY'VE BLACKED OUT HIS RADIO, BUT ONE THING'S CERTAIN...HE DOESN'T WANT TO GO INTO THAT SHIP !

HIS FRIEND WAS IN TROUBLE...AND JET-ACE WAS PREPARED TO GO TO DESPERATE LENGTHS TO SAVE HIM
I'LL HAVE TO GET AT THOSE KIDNAPPERS FROM CLOSE QUARTERS!
HE EJECTED HIMSELF FROM HIS COCKPIT...
I'LL HAVE A JOB TO GET AT HIM... BUT AT LEAST I CAN TRY!
HE PUSHED HIMSELF AWAY FROM HIS INTERCEPTOR, AND, WEIGHTLESS, FLOATED TOWARDS THE BLACK HULL-PLATES OF THE ALIEN SHIP
HE DRIFTED NEARER, AND SWUNG UP HIS FEET SO THAT THEY WOULD TOUCH THE ALIEN VESSEL FIRST. AND IT WAS AS WELL THAT HE DID...!
EEEEAAAGH!
FOR THE THICK RUBBER SOLES SAVED HIS LIFE BY INSULATING MOST OF THE TERRIFIC ELECTRICAL SHOCK THAT THE BLACK SHIP FLUNG AT HIM!


JET-ACE WAS STUNNED. ALL THE STARS IN THE UNIVERSE BLACKED OUT, AND WITH THEM WENT ALL HIS CONSCIOUSNESS OF FEELING AND HEARING. THE FOUR MEN CREWING Z-4 FOUND HIM HANGING LIMPLY ON THE END OF HIS SAFETY LINE

A FEW MOMENTS LATER HE WAS ABOARD Z-4
HE'LL BE ALL RIGHT NOW. DID YOU GET THE INTERCEPTOR BACK ON BOARD, MORGAN ?
IT'S SAFE AND SECURE !

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ALIEN SHIP ? IS IT STILL HANGING AROUND ?
IT MADE OFF ON A FAIRLY STEADY COURSE. WE WERE ABLE TO TRACK IT UNTIL WE STOPPED TO HAUL YOU ABOARD !

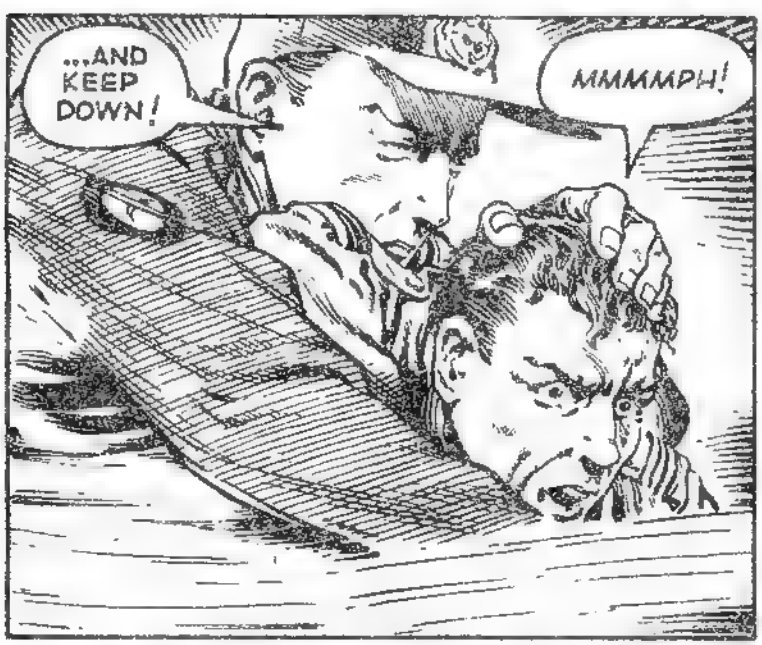
ALTHOUGH STILL SHAKY AFTER HIS EXPERIENCE, LOGAN HAD LOST NONE OF HIS ENERGY AND DRIVE
THE ALIEN SHIP IS STILL ON THE SCREEN. LET'S CHASE IT ! AFTER ALL, WE CAME THIS WAY LOOKING FOR TROUBLE — SO NOW THAT WE'VE FOUND IT, LET'S HANG ON TO IT !

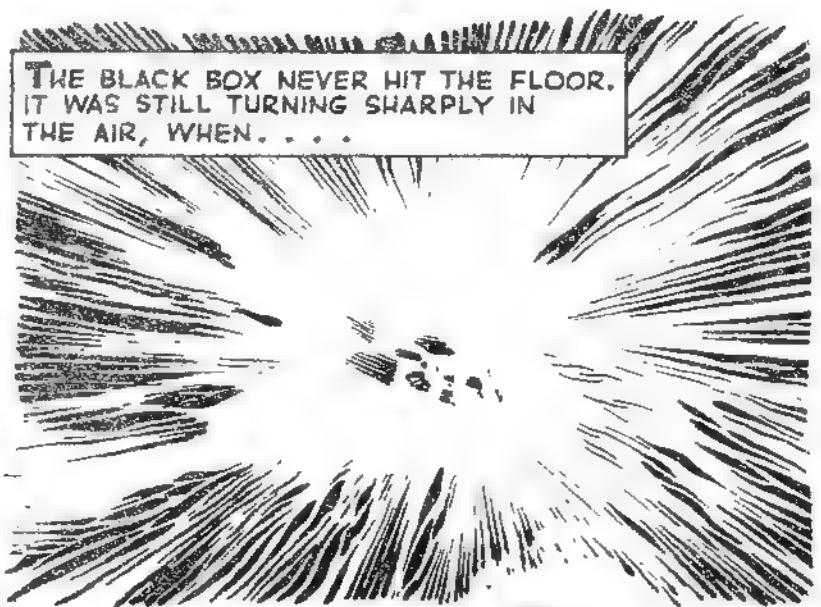
JET-ACE TOOK THE CONTROLS. THE ALIEN SHIP MADE NO ATTEMPT TO SHAKE OFF ITS PURSUER. THE CHASE HAD BEEN ON FOR ABOUT AN HOUR, WHEN LOGAN TURNED CASUALLY TO MORGAN . . . .
MORGAN, THERE'S A SMALL BLACK BOX IN MY INTERCEPTOR COCKPIT. WOULD YOU MIND GETTING IT FOR ME PLEASE ?
OH, SURE !

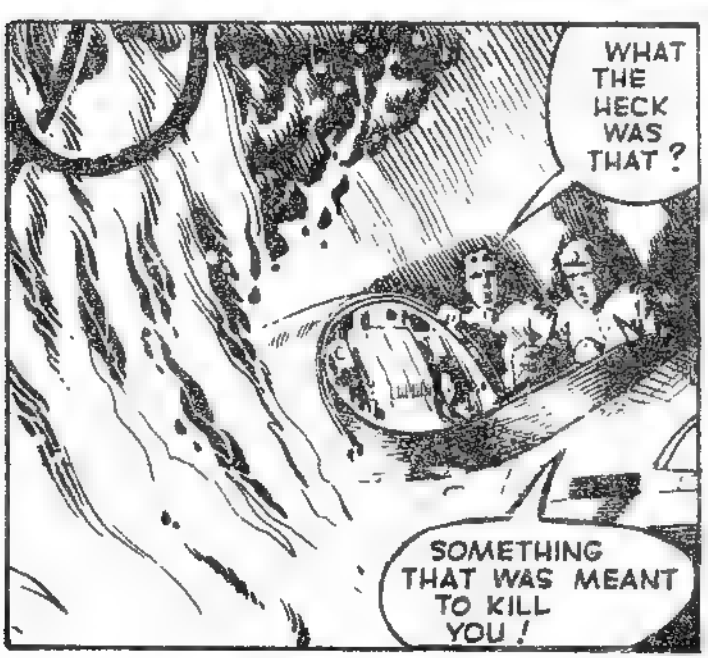
NOW WHY DID I SAY THAT? I DON'T EVEN OWN A SMALL BLACK BOX...
SUDDENLY JET-ACE LEFT THE CONTROLS AND LEAPED ACROSS THE CABIN AS THOUGH THE SOLES OF HIS FEET WERE ON FIRE !
TAKE THE CONTROLS, COBBY! I'VE GOT TO STOP MORGAN. . . .BEFORE HE GETS KILLED !
JET-ACE LOGAN SKIDDED THROUGH THE HATCHWAY THAT OPENED INTO THE INTERCEPTOR HOLD. HIS VOICE RANG URGENTLY AGAINST THE WHITE METAL WALLS OF THE LARGE CHAMBER . . . .
LEAVE IT, MORGAN ! DON'T TOUCH IT !

BUT JET-ACE WAS TOO LATE. MORGAN ALREADY HELD THE SMALL BLACK BOX... AND LOGAN KNEW THAT THE BOX WAS PACKED WITH LETHAL DEATH !
DON'T HOLD IT...PUT IT DOWN..!
KEEP YOUR HAIR ON, LOGAN...I'VE GOT IT NOW ! IF YOU DIDN'T WANT ME TO TOUCH IT, YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE ASKED ME...

JET-ACE REALISED THERE WAS NO TIME TO ARGUE, AND SO—
GET DOWN!
OOOPH!


...AND KEEP DOWN!
MMMMPH!


THE BLACK BOX NEVER HIT THE FLOOR. IT WAS STILL TURNING SHARPLY IN THE AIR, WHEN. . . .


WHAT THE HECK WAS THAT ?
SOMETHING THAT WAS MEANT TO KILL YOU !

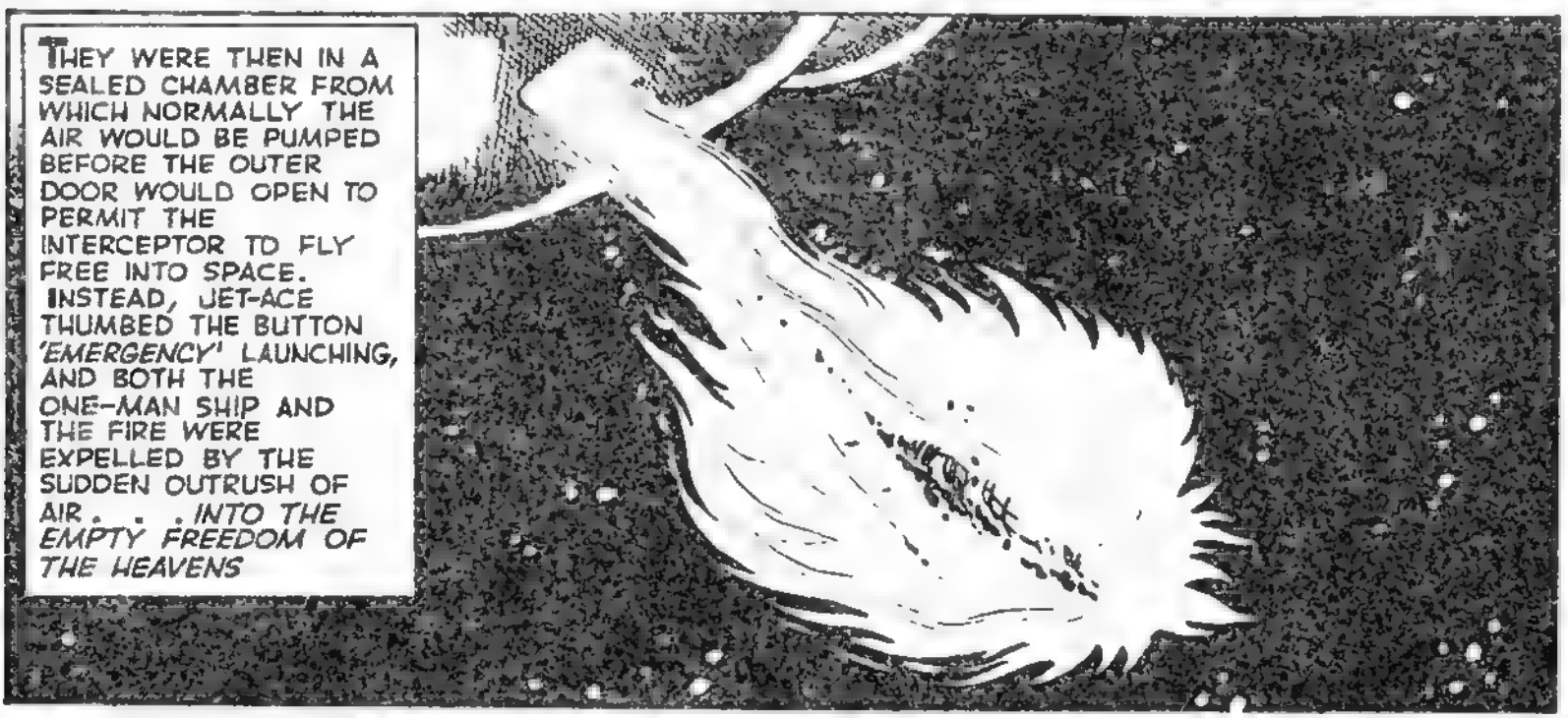
STOP GAWPING, MORGAN, AND DO SOMETHING . . . ELSE WE'LL HAVE Z-4 BURN AWAY FROM UNDER US !

JET-ACE PROPELLED MORGAN IN THE DIRECTION OF THE FIRE ALARM, WHILST HE HIMSELF BROUGHT A WALL FIRE-EXTINGUISHER INTO PLAY. . . .
I CAN FEEL THE HEAT OF THOSE FLAMES FROM HERE... IT'S LIKE A FURNACE !

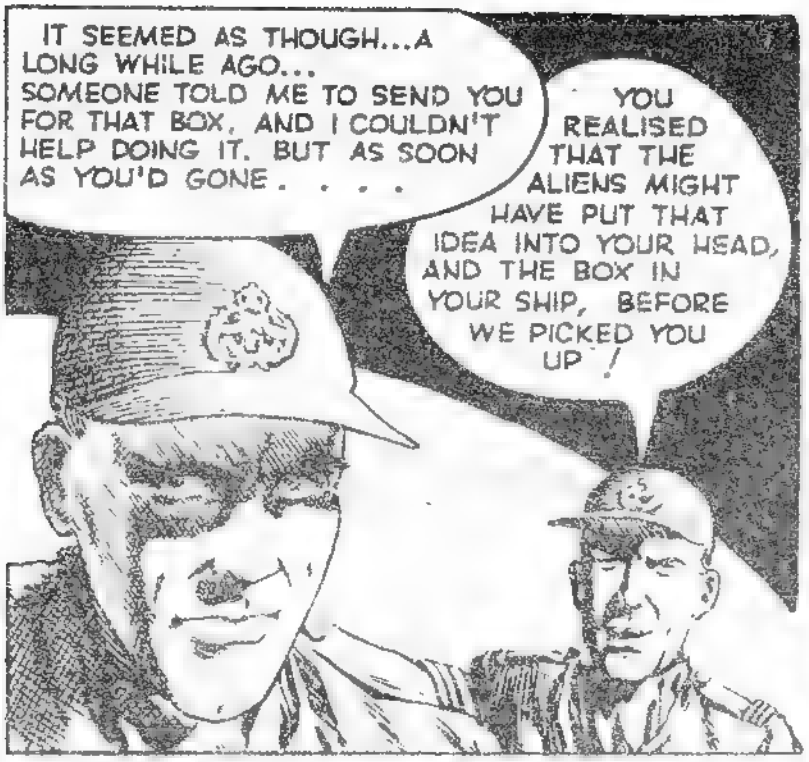
WITHIN SECONDS THE TWO OTHER CREW MEN WERE IN THE ROOM BRINGING MORE CHEMICAL EXTINGUISHERS WITH THEM. . . . .
THE FIRE'S SPREADING...THERE'S ONLY ONE THING TO DO !

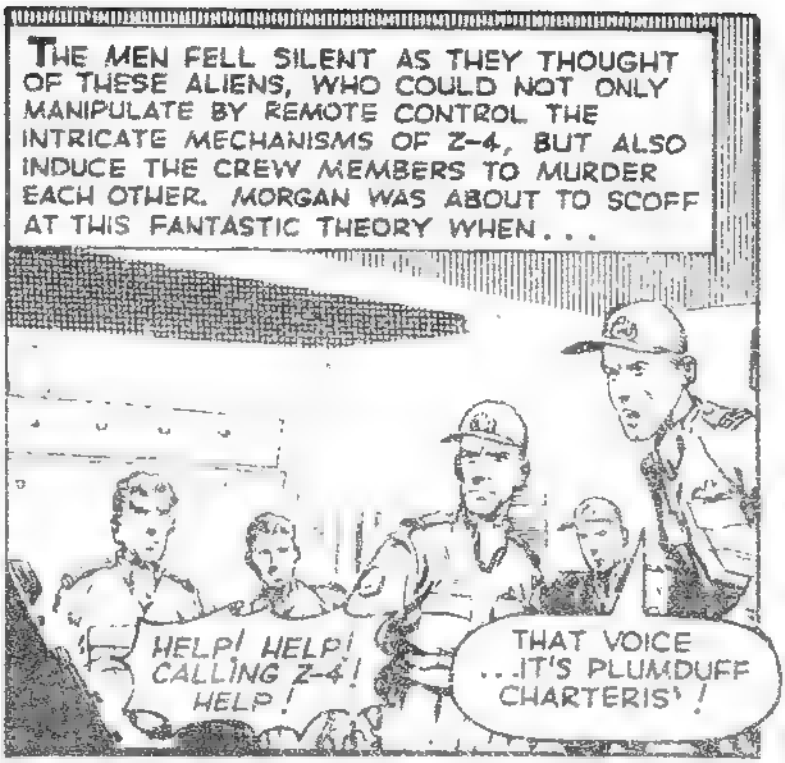
JET-ACE TOSSED HIS USELESS EXTINGUISHER INTO THE ROARING INFERNO AND DODGED ROUND THE AREA OF CHOKING HEAT TO A CONTROL PANEL. . . AND THE SWITCHES USED FOR DROPPING THE INTERCEPTOR SHIPS OUT INTO SPACE
STAND BACK... STAND BACK!

THE CREW MEN LEAPED BACK AS THE FLOOR SANK AWAY UNDER THEM . . .
. . .AND THE FIRE AND THE INTERCEPTOR SHIP SLID FROM VIEW !


THEY WERE THEN IN A SEALED CHAMBER FROM WHICH NORMALLY THE AIR WOULD BE PUMPED BEFORE THE OUTER DOOR WOULD OPEN TO PERMIT THE INTERCEPTOR TO FLY FREE INTO SPACE. INSTEAD, JET-ACE THUMBED THE BUTTON 'EMERGENCY' LAUNCHING, AND BOTH THE ONE-MAN SHIP AND THE FIRE WERE EXPELLED BY THE SUDDEN OUTRUSH OF AIR . . . INTO THE EMPTY FREEDOM OF THE HEAVENS

THE DANGER HAD BEEN AVERTED, AND THE FOUR MEN RETURNED TO THE CONTROL CABIN WHERE COBB HAD REMAINED ON DUTY ALL THE TIME
FIRST YOU SEND ME TO GET THAT BOX...THEN YOU SAY YOU DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT IT... NEXT YOU SUDDENLY REMEMBER THAT IT'S GOING TO BLOW UP. . .YOU DON'T MAKE SENSE LOGAN !
IT SEEMED AS THOUGH I KNEW ABOUT THAT BOX IN A KIND OF—DREAM !


IT SEEMED AS THOUGH...A LONG WHILE AGO... SOMEONE TOLD ME TO SEND YOU FOR THAT BOX, AND I COULDN'T HELP DOING IT. BUT AS SOON AS YOU'D GONE. . . .
YOU REALISED THAT THE ALIENS MIGHT HAVE PUT THAT IDEA INTO YOUR HEAD, AND THE BOX IN YOUR SHIP, BEFORE WE PICKED YOU UP!


THE MEN FELL SILENT AS THEY THOUGHT OF THESE ALIENS, WHO COULD NOT ONLY MANIPULATE BY REMOTE CONTROL THE INTRICATE MECHANISMS OF Z-4, BUT ALSO INDUCE THE CREW MEMBERS TO MURDER EACH OTHER. MORGAN WAS ABOUT TO SCOFF AT THIS FANTASTIC THEORY WHEN...
HELP! HELP! CALLING Z-4! HELP!
THAT VOICE ...IT'S PLUMDUFF CHARTERIS'!

CHARTERIS WAS NOT A MAN WHO EASILY SHOWED FEAR, BUT HIS WORDS QUAVERED, AND HIS SENTENCES WERE JERKED OUT IN A STRANGELY HIGH, NERVOUS PITCH. . . . .
LISTEN TO ME! DON'T WASTE TIME ASKING QUESTIONS...I CAN'T HEAR THEM. THIS THING WILL ONLY TRANSMIT. AND...AND I'VE JUST GOT A FEW SECONDS BEFORE THEY FIND ME...

DON'T FOLLOW ME! WHATEVER YOU DO DON'T FOLLOW ME! YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO RESCUE ME OR DO ANYTHING! TURN AROUND AND SAVE YOURSELVES. . .WHILE THERE'S STILL TIME!

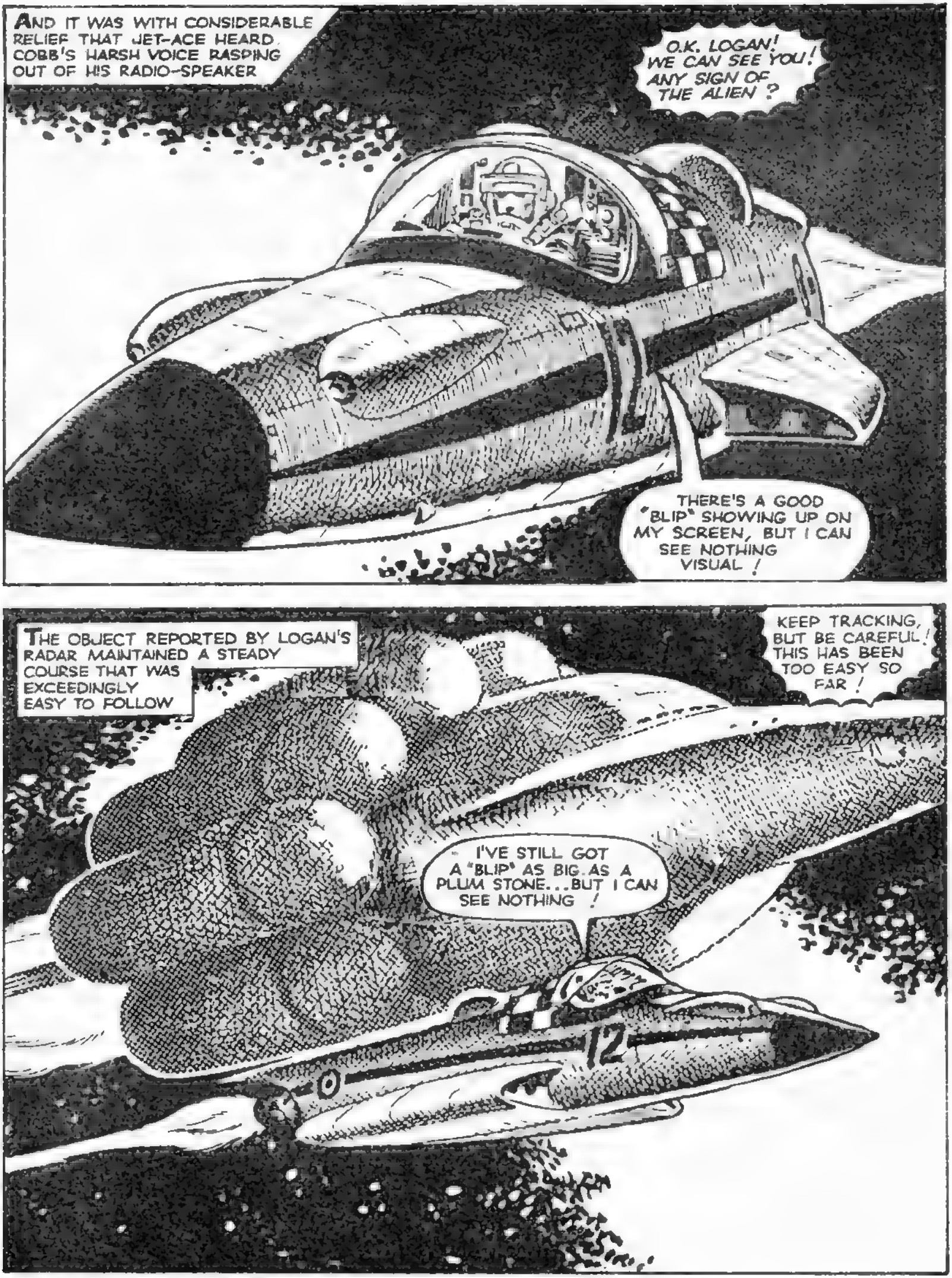
THEN CONTACT WITH Z-4 WAS CURTLY BLACKED OUT IN A TANGLE OF EXPLODING AND BROKEN CIRCUITS. . . .
PLEASE DO WHAT I. . . . . AAAH!

THE SPACEMAN WAS TRAPPED. HE WAS THE PREY, AND HE HAD BEEN HUNTED DOWN AND CAUGHT!
AAAAGH! NO! NO!

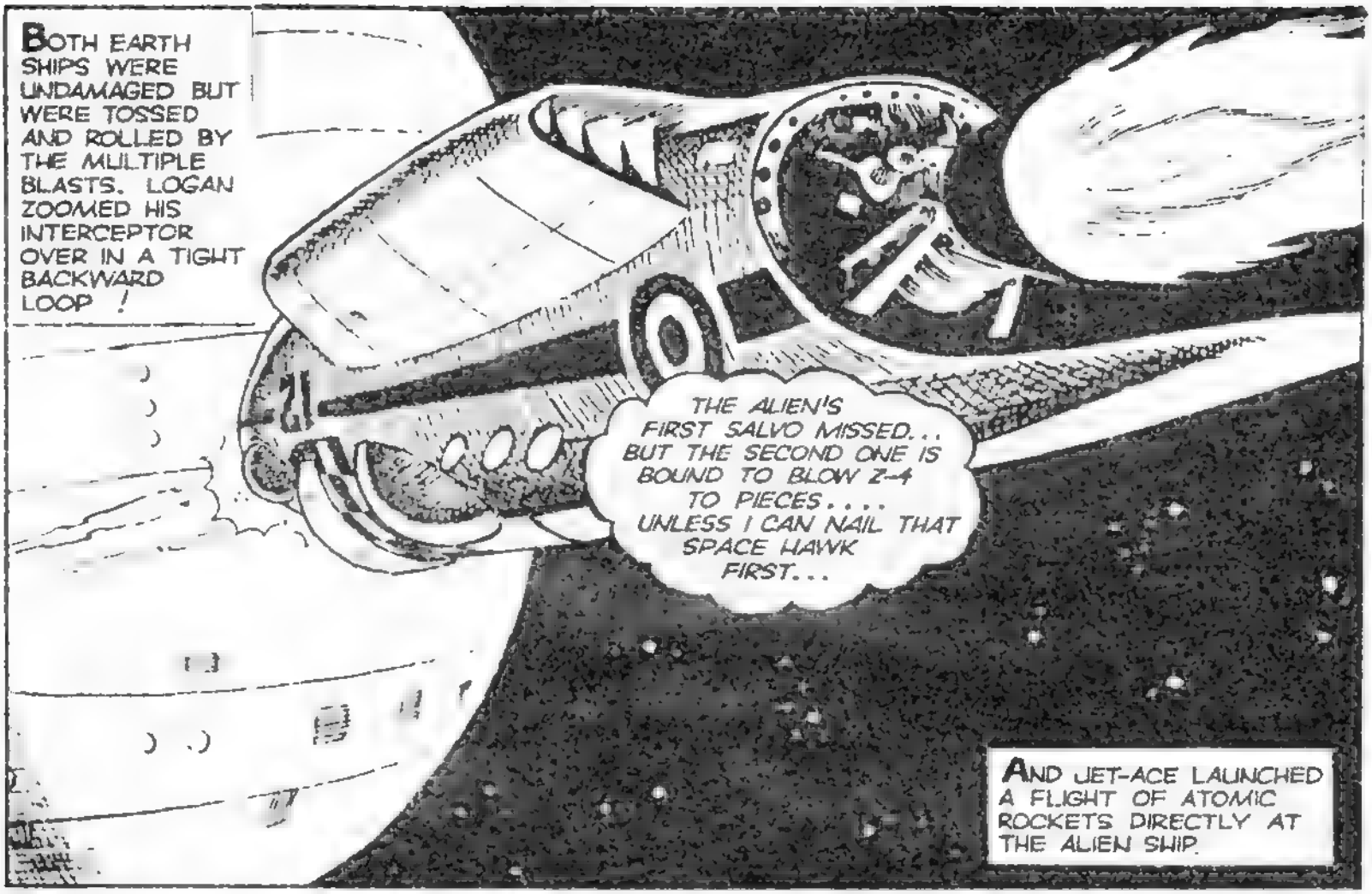
THAT'S ANOTHER ALIEN TRICK...TO GET US TO LAY OFF .THE CHASE AND LEAVE POOR OLD PLUMDUFF AT THEIR MERCY. YOU'RE NOT GOING TO FALL FOR IT, ARE YOU, COBBY?
WE'VE LOST FOUR MEN ALREADY...FIVE WITH CHARTERIS. TH'S IS DANGEROUS. IT'LL NEED CAREFUL HANDLING. . . !

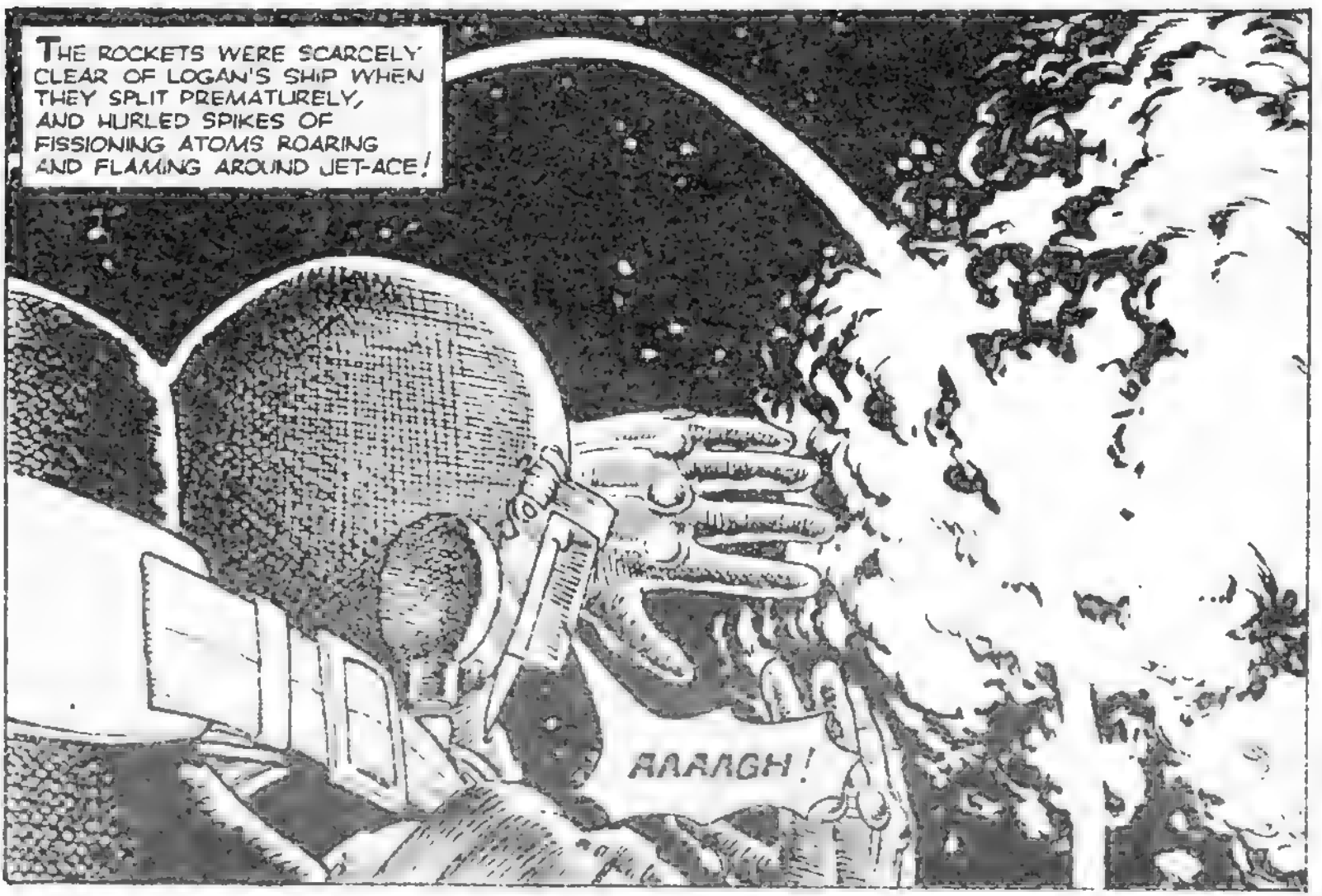
THEN MORGAN SPOKE. EVER SINCE THE VOYAGE HAD BEGUN, HE AND LOGAN HAD BEEN IN CONTINUAL AND OFTEN VIOLENT, OPPOSITION
I SAY WE DO WHAT CHARTERIS SAID ...SAVE OURSELVES. WE ALL KNOW THAT CHARTERIS IS LOGAN'S SPECIAL BUDDY, BUT THAT'S NO REASON WHY WE SHOULD ALL GET KILLED, ESPECIALLY SINCE WE SAW CHARTERIS DELIBERATELY BLAST DICKINSON TO ATOMS! CHARTERIS DESERVES ALL HE GETS. . . .

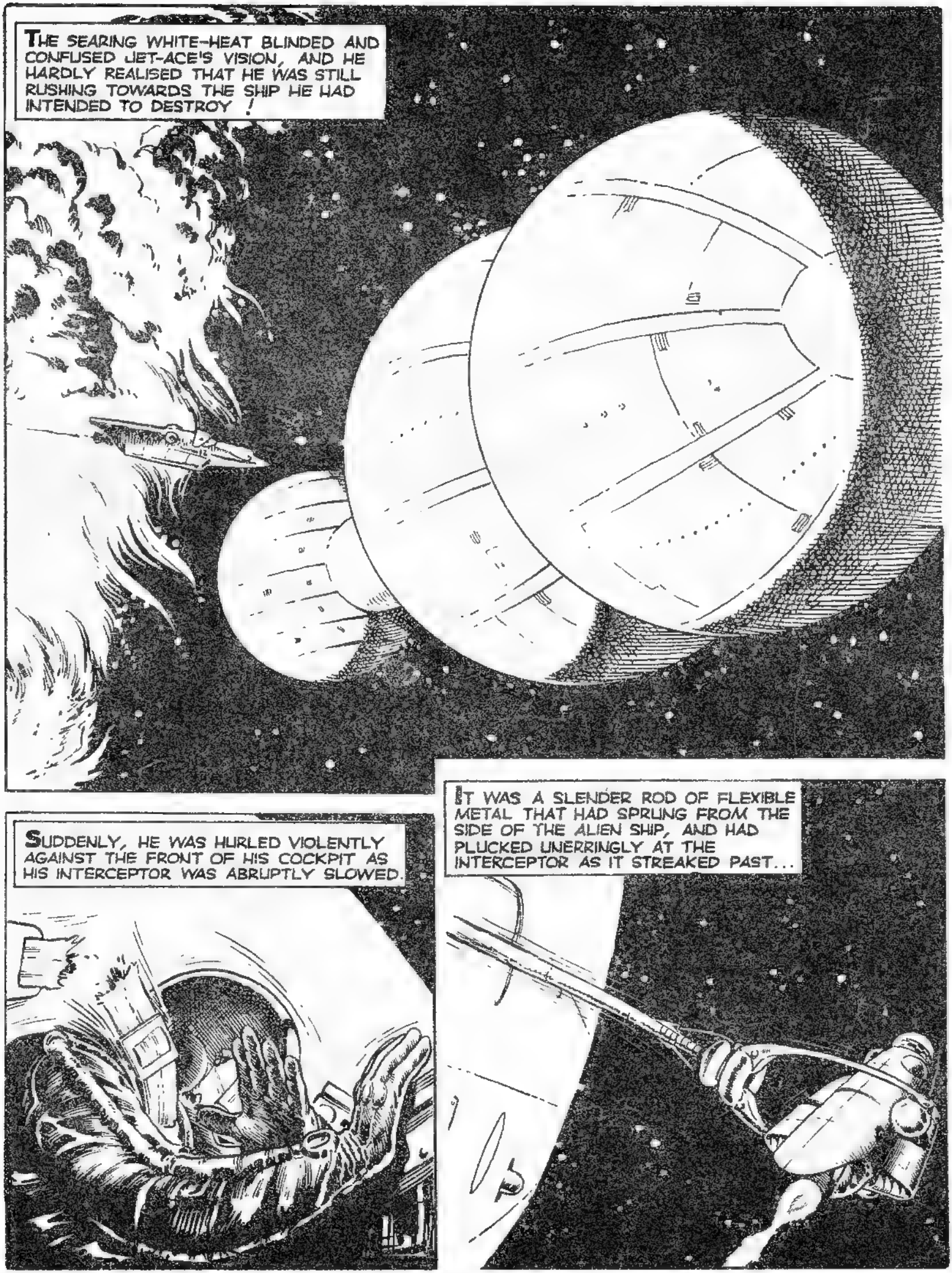
MAYBE LOGAN'S ON THE SIDE OF THOSE ALIENS, FOR ALL WE KNOW! AND UNLESS YOU GIVE THE ORDERS TO TURN ABOUT, COBB, I'LL USE THIS...ON LOGAN!
DON'T BE A FOOL, MORGAN! PUT THAT GUN DOWN!
JET-ACE DIDN'T HESITATE—BUT WENT INTO INSTANT ACTION...
MORGAN CRASHED BACKWARDS. HIS FINGER JERKED ON THE TRIGGER. A SHOT SCREAMED ACROSS THE CABIN. . . . .
...AND SLIVERS OF GLASS FOUNTAINED BACK INTO THE ROOM FROM THE SHATTERED SCREEN OF THE FORWARD RADAR SCANNER!
A LUCKY SHOT, BUT IT'S ACHIEVED WHAT I WANTED. YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO TRACK THAT ALIEN NOW THAT THE FORWARD RADAR IS OUT OF ACTION...
IT CAN BE REPAIRED, AND UNTIL THEN I'LL TRACK THE ALIEN IN AN INTERCEPTOR. THERE'S RADAR WORKING IN THAT, AND Z-4 CAN FOLLOW ME VISUALLY!
THIRTY SECONDS LATER, JET-ACE WAS MANOEUVRING A ONE-MAN INTERCEPTOR SHIP CLEAR OF THE HULL OF Z-4
12
LET'S HOPE THE ALIENS DON'T JAM MY TWO-WAY RADIO CONTACT WITH THE SHIP, AS THEY'VE DONE BEFORE...


AND IT WAS WITH CONSIDERABLE RELIEF THAT JET-ACE HEARD COBB'S HARSH VOICE RASPING OUT OF HIS RADIO-SPEAKER
O.K. LOGAN! WE CAN SEE YOU! ANY SIGN OF THE ALIEN ?
THERE'S A GOOD "BLIP" SHOWING UP ON MY SCREEN, BUT I CAN SEE NOTHING VISUAL !
THE OBJECT REPORTED BY LOGAN'S RADAR MAINTAINED A STEADY COURSE THAT WAS EXCEEDINGLY EASY TO FOLLOW
KEEP TRACKING, BUT BE CAREFUL! THIS HAS BEEN TOO EASY SO FAR !
I'VE STILL GOT A "BLIP" AS BIG AS A PLUM STONE...BUT I CAN SEE NOTHING !

THEN, AT THAT MOMENT, JET-ACE HAD AN UNEASY PRICKING BETWEEN HIS SHOULDER BLADES. HE TURNED TO GLANCE AT THE WHIRLING GALAXIES BEHIND HIM AND. . .
COBBY! THE ALIEN'S SITTING RIGHT ON YOUR TAIL! EMERGENCY THIRTY DEGREE TURN..... GREEN SECTOR!
AS THOUGH LOCKED BY AN INVISIBLE FORCE, THE TWO SHIPS, THE LARGE AND THE SMALL, WHIPPED AROUND ON SHARP, EVASIVE ARCS. . .THEN THE HEAVENS BLAZED ANGRILY WITH WHITE AND ORANGE FIRE!
THE ALIEN'S SHOOTING... AND Z-4'S HALF BLIND WITHOUT ITS RADAR!


BOTH EARTH SHIPS WERE UNDAMAGED BUT WERE TOSSED AND ROLLED BY THE MULTIPLE BLASTS. LOGAN ZOOMED HIS INTERCEPTOR OVER IN A TIGHT BACKWARD LOOP !
THE ALIEN'S FIRST SALVO MISSED... BUT THE SECOND ONE IS BOUND TO BLOW Z-4 TO PIECES.... UNLESS I CAN NAIL THAT SPACE HAWK FIRST...
AND JET-ACE LAUNCHED A FLIGHT OF ATOMIC ROCKETS DIRECTLY AT THE ALIEN SHIP.


THE ROCKETS WERE SCARCELY CLEAR OF LOGAN'S SHIP WHEN THEY SPLIT PREMATURELY, AND HURLED SPIKES OF FISSIONING ATOMS ROARING AND FLAMING AROUND JET-ACE!
AAAAGH!


THE SEARING WHITE-HEAT BLINDED AND CONFUSED JET-ACE'S VISION, AND HE HARDLY REALISED THAT HE WAS STILL RUSHING TOWARDS THE SHIP HE HAD INTENDED TO DESTROY !
SUDDENLY, HE WAS HURLED VIOLENTLY AGAINST THE FRONT OF HIS COCKPIT AS HIS INTERCEPTOR WAS ABRUPTLY SLOWED.
IT WAS A SLENDER ROD OF FLEXIBLE METAL THAT HAD SPRUNG FROM THE SIDE OF THE ALIEN SHIP, AND HAD PLUCKED UNERRINGLY AT THE INTERCEPTOR AS IT STREAKED PAST...

LIKE A HIGH TENSILE SPRING, THE ARM PLAYED THE INTERCEPTOR BACK AND FORTH UNTIL ANOTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICE HAD KILLED ITS ROCKET MOTORS. FOR SEVERAL MOMENTS JET-ACE COULD DO LITTLE MORE THAN WATCH THE STARS SWING BACK AND FORTH ACROSS THE SKY. . . . .

BATTERED AND BRUISED, LOGAN SQUIRMED THE RIGHT WAY UP AGAIN, THEN GASPED AS HE TOOK IN THE UNCANNY SCENE OUTSIDE. . . .

I'M CAUGHT ON THE END OF A LINE...AND SO IS Z-4! I WONDER IF COBBY AND THE BOYS CAN SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING?

LOGAN SWITCHED ON HIS TWO-WAY RADIO, AND FOUND THAT IT WAS STILL WORKING. . . .

LOGAN, CALLING Z-FOUR! CAN YOU HEAR ME?

WE CAN HEAR YOU, LOGAN! COBB SPEAKING!

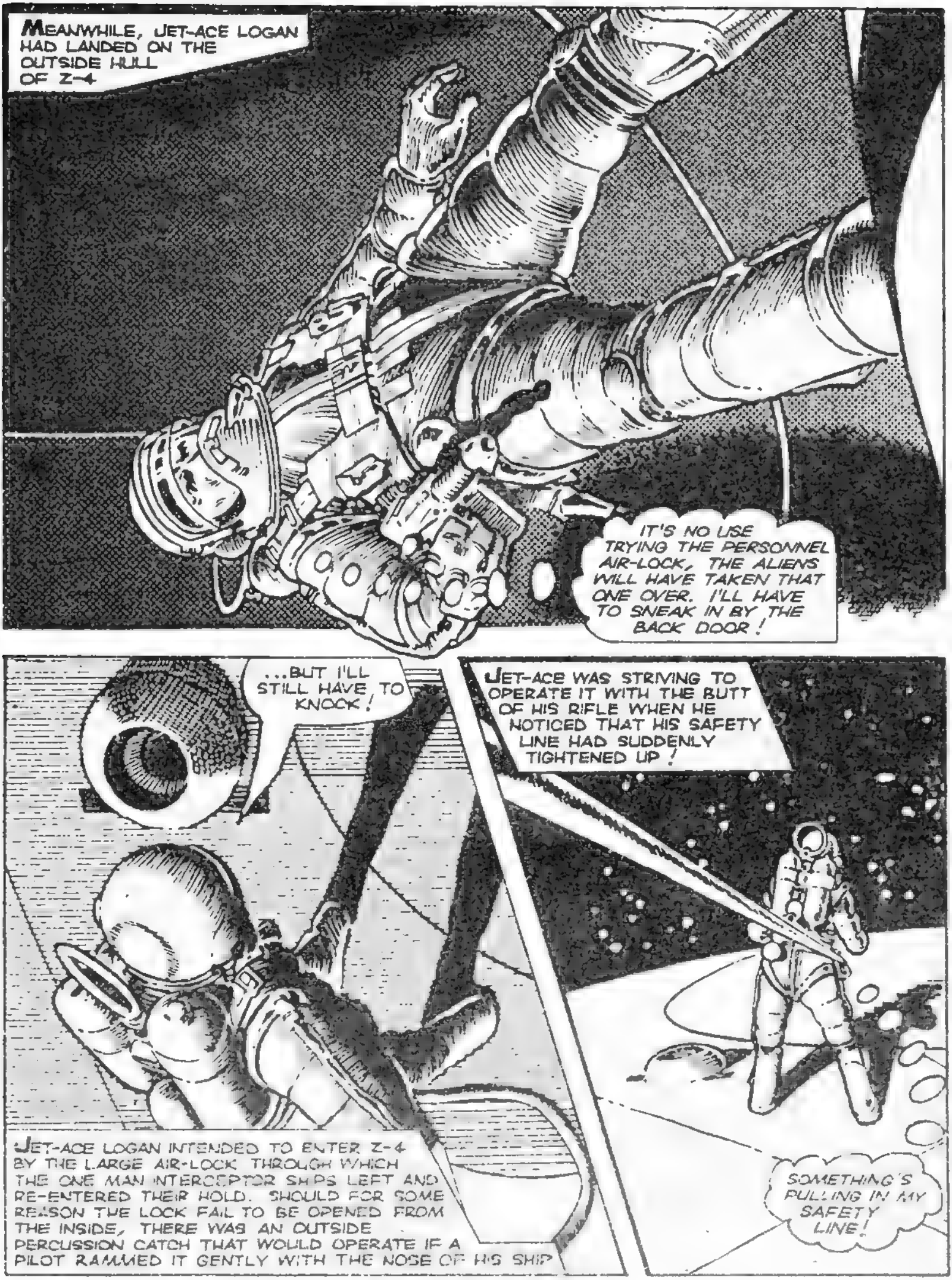
FROM MY POSITION I CAN SEE THAT YOU'RE HOOKED UP ALONGSIDE THE ALIEN SHIP.. THEY INTEND TO BOARD YOU! I'LL COME ACROSS AND TRY TO COME ABOARD, TOO...

THERE WERE FOUR MEN STILL ABOARD THE R.A.F. SHIP, AND THEY WERE ALL IN THE CONTROL ROOM, LISTENING WITH TENSED FACES TO LOGAN'S WORDS
IT MAY BE A GOOD IDEA TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY'RE AFTER BEFORE WE DO ANYTHING ELSE. THEY COULD HAVE KILLED US ALL BY NOW IF THEY'D WANTED TO. AND RIGHT NOW, WE STAND NO CHANCE AT ALL IN A STRAIGHT FIGHT!
THAT'S COMMON SENSE, LOGAN!
THE TWO MEN BESIDE COBB AGREED, BUT MORGAN, THE ONE HANDCUFFED TO THE CHAIR BEHIND THEM, DID NOT
LOGAN! LOGAN! LOGAN! THAT'S ALL I HEAR! HE RUNS THIS SHIP, COBB! NOT YOU! AND HE'S BROUGHT US DEEPER INTO THIS TROUBLE THAN WE NEED BE!
LOGAN'S PROBABLY IN LEAGUE WITH THOSE ALIENS...WORKING FOR THEM IN SOME WAY! I'M NOT SURRENDERING TO ANY PALS OF HIS... I'M GOING TO FIGHT!
MORGAN VAULTED CLEAR OF THE IMPRISONING CHAIR, AND CHARGED OUT OF THE CONTROL ROOM. COBB SENT ONE OF THE CREWMEN, HARPER, AFTER HIM!
HE'S NOT HERE! PERHAPS HE'S GONE ON TO THE ARMOURY!
HARPER RAN FORWARD. HE WAS ALONGSIDE THE AIR-LOCK WHEN LIGHTS ABOVE IT FLASHED ON. IT HAD BEEN OPENED FROM THE OUTSIDE
LOGAN WAS RIGHT! THE ALIENS ARE COMING IN!
THEN THE INNER DOOR SLID OPEN. HARPER CHOKED ON A GASP OF SURPRISE...MOVED HIS GRIP ON THE PISTOL UNCERTAINLY. . . .

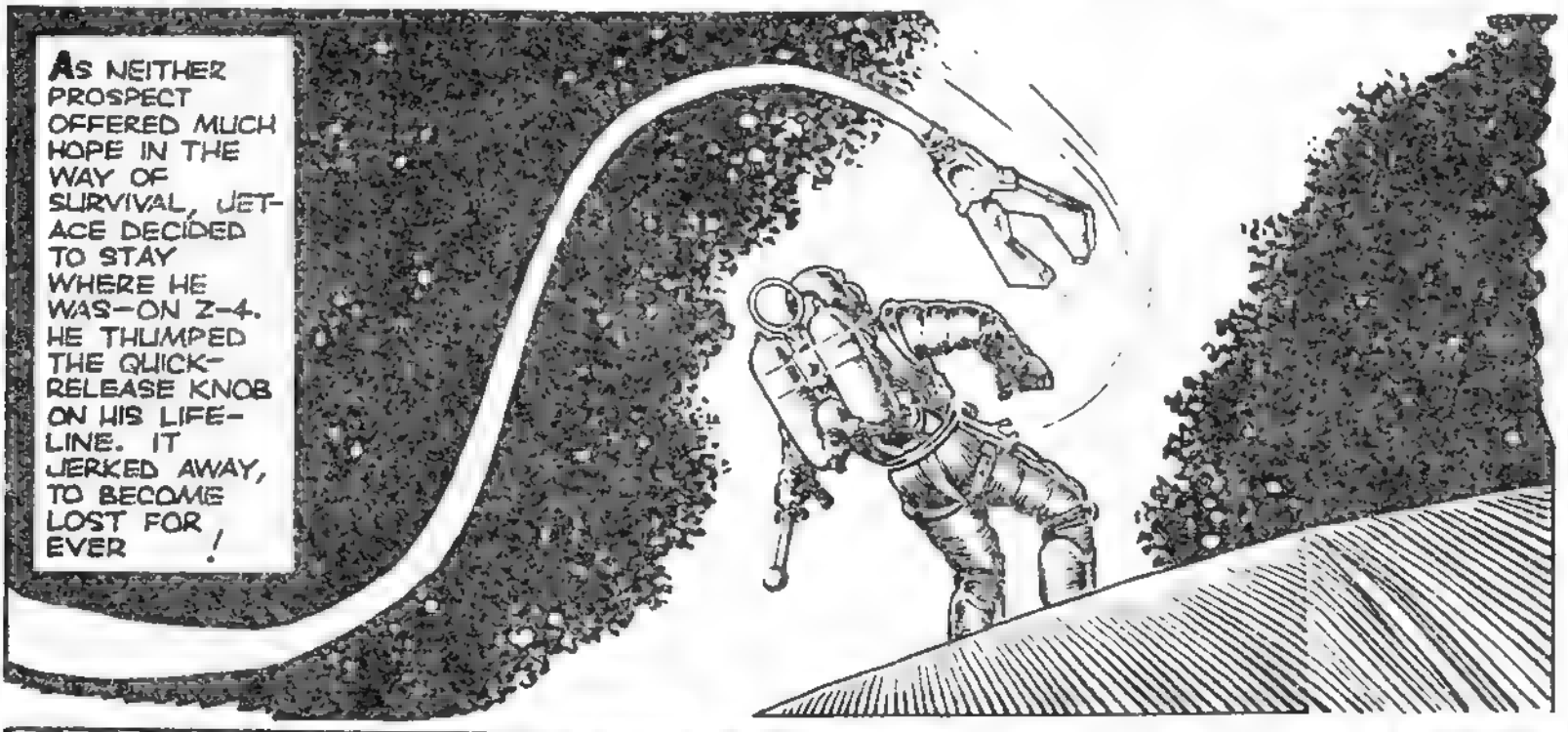
HE CRIED OUT IN AGONY AS A STEEL BLUE SHAFT OF LIGHT STRUCK HIS CHEST...
...A SECOND LATER HE HIT THE FLOOR
DEAD!
MORGAN HAD MOVED ON TO THE ARMOURY. HE HAD ALSO HEARD THE AIR-LOCK OPEN, AND HAD SEEN HARPER FALL
THEY DON'T WANT TO KILL US, SAID LOGAN! HUH! I WON'T TANGLE WITH THE ALIENS—I'LL KEEP RIGHT OUT OF THEIR WAY... AND SAVE EVERYTHING I'VE GOT FOR WHEN LOGAN COMES BACK ABOARD!

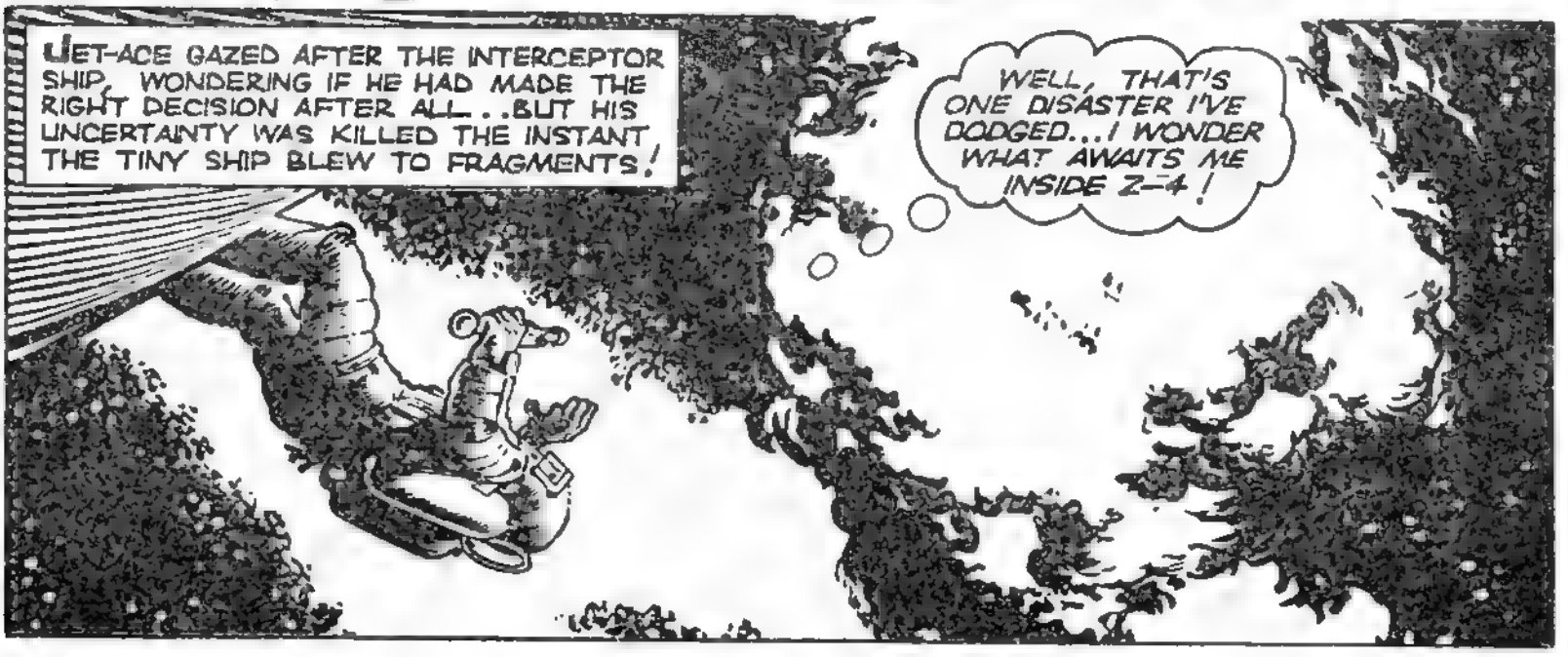
JET-ACE COULD SEE THAT THE ALIENS WERE CONCENTRATING THEIR ATTENTION UPON Z-4, AND HE MEANT TO RE-JOIN COBB AND THE OTHERS ABOARD HER, AND HELP THEM IF HE COULD. . . . . .
IF I ENTER Z-4 UNEXPECTEDLY, PERHAPS I CAN THROW THE ALIENS OFF BALANCE, AND SAVE THE SITUATION!
HE FIXED HIS SAFETY LINE AND KICKED HIMSELF FROM HIS INTERCEPTOR SHIP TOWARDS THE GIANT R.A.F. SPACESHIP!

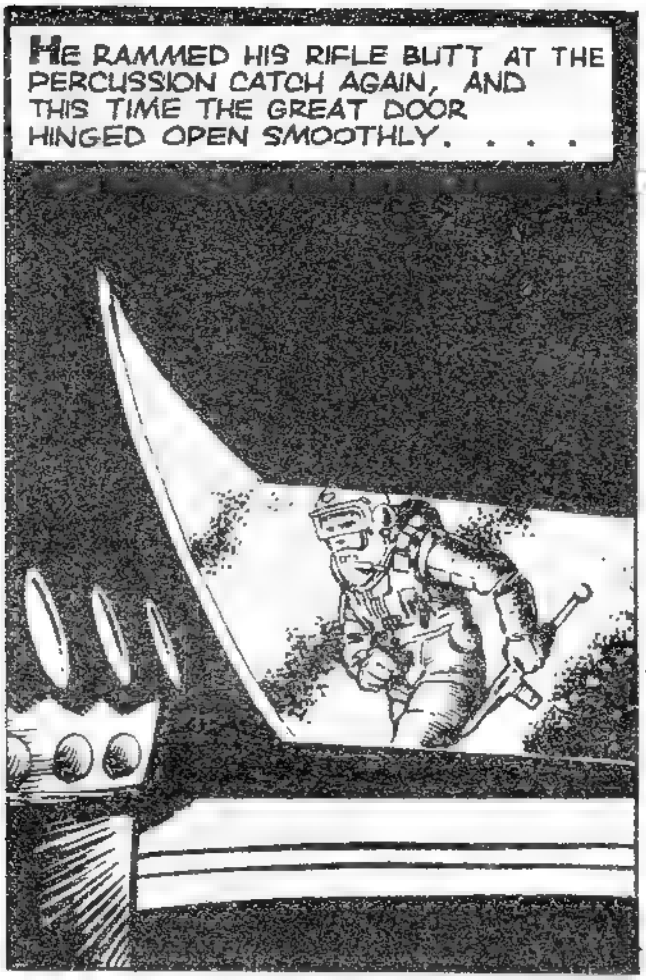
BUT INSIDE THE SHIP WAS MORE TROUBLE THAN JUST THE ALIENS! THERE WAS MORGAN, A CREWMAN WHO DURING THE VOYAGE HAD COME TO SUSPECT THAT JET-ACE WAS WORKING IN LEAGUE WITH THE ENEMY. NOW HE WAS WAITING TO KILL HIM !
I CAN HEAR THE ALIENS COMING ABOARD. IF I KEEP HIDDEN THEY WON'T FIND ME... UNTIL I'VE BLASTED THEIR FRIEND LOGAN !
MORGAN REMAINED OUT OF SIGHT, LISTENING, AS THE ALIENS MOVED INTO THE SHIP. THEN THERE WAS SILENCE FOR SEVERAL SECONDS, FOLLOWED BY A GENTLE HISSING. . . .
THAT SMELL...WHAT IS IT ?
FIVE SECONDS LATER MORGAN WAS CHOKING IN A DENSE MIST OF ACRID FUMES !
AAAGH!
THE SAME VILE STENCH WAS BURNING THE THROATS OF COMMANDER COBB AND THE OTHER CREWMAN IN THE MAIN CONTROL ROOM !
WHAT IS IT SIR ?
DON'T... KNOW...
THE TWO MEN FELL. BUT EVEN BEFORE THEY HIT THE FLOOR, THERE WAS MOVEMENT FROM THE DENSEST PART OF THE FOG, AND STEEL ARMS SPRANG FORWARD !


MEANWHILE, JET-ACE LOGAN HAD LANDED ON THE OUTSIDE HULL OF Z-4
IT'S NO USE TRYING THE PERSONNEL AIR-LOCK, THE ALIENS WILL HAVE TAKEN THAT ONE OVER. I'LL HAVE TO SNEAK IN BY THE BACK DOOR!
...BUT I'LL STILL HAVE TO KNOCK!
JET-ACE WAS STRIVING TO OPERATE IT WITH THE BUTT OF HIS RIFLE WHEN HE NOTICED THAT HIS SAFETY LINE HAD SUDDENLY TIGHTENED UP!
JET-ACE LOGAN INTENDED TO ENTER Z-4 BY THE LARGE AIR-LOCK THROUGH WHICH THE ONE MAN INTERCEPTOR SHIPS LEFT AND RE-ENTERED THEIR HOLD. SHOULD FOR SOME REASON THE LOCK FAIL TO BE OPENED FROM THE INSIDE, THERE WAS AN OUTSIDE PERCUSSION CATCH THAT WOULD OPERATE IF A PILOT RAMMED IT GENTLY WITH THE NOSE OF HIS SHIP
SOMETHING'S PULLING IN MY SAFETY LINE!

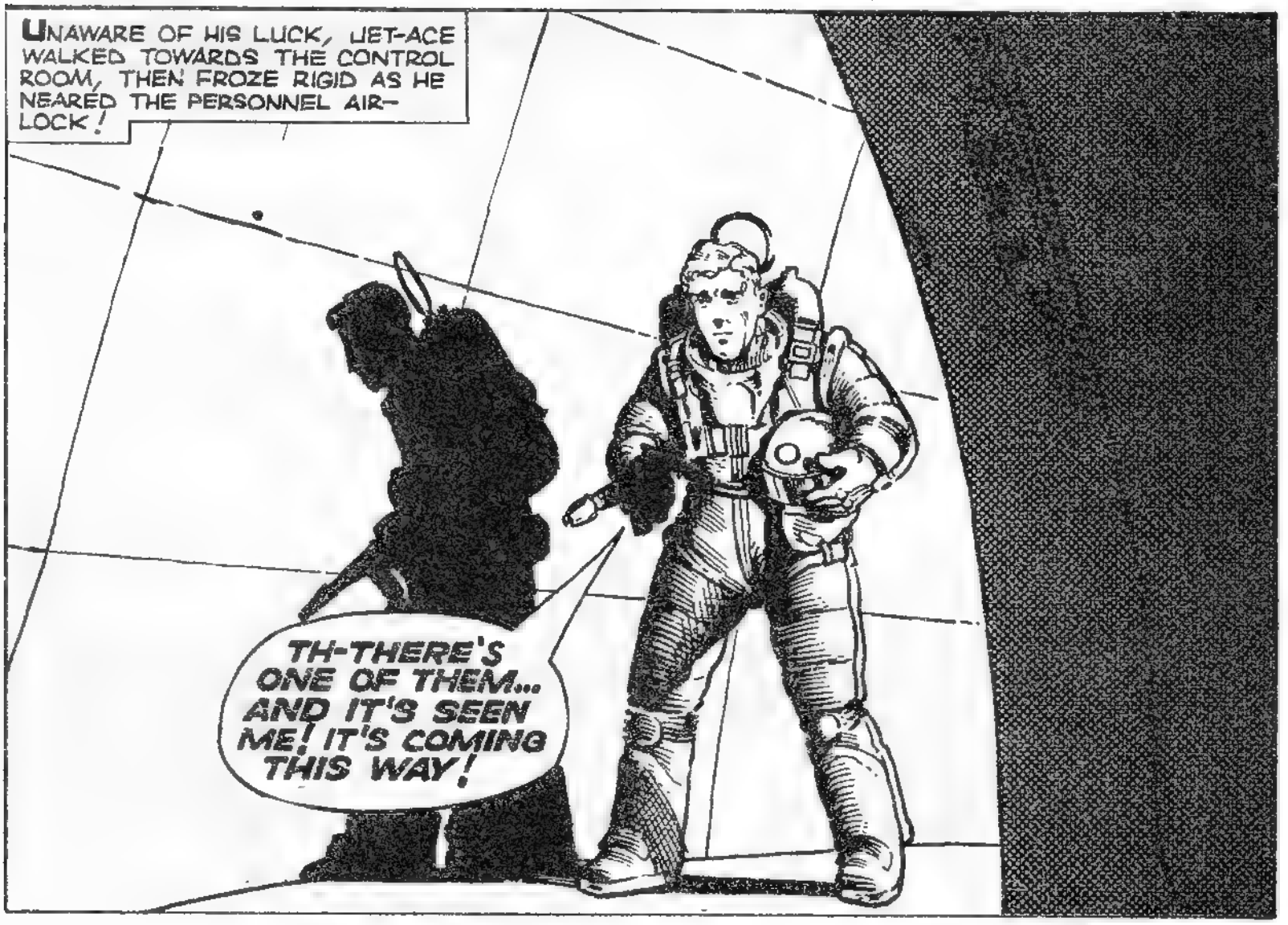
THEN HE SAW THAT HIS ABANDONED INTERCEPTOR SHIP, TO WHICH HIS LINE WAS CONNECTED, HAD BEEN PUSHED CLEAR OF THE SPACESHIP AND WAS DRIFTING AWAY INTO SPACE...
SO THEY DON'T WANT THE INTERCEPTOR NOW I'M NO LONGER IN IT. BUT WHAT DO I DO NOW? DO I STAY WITH IT ON THE END OF MY LINE, OR TAKE A CHANCE ON GETTING INTO Z-4?

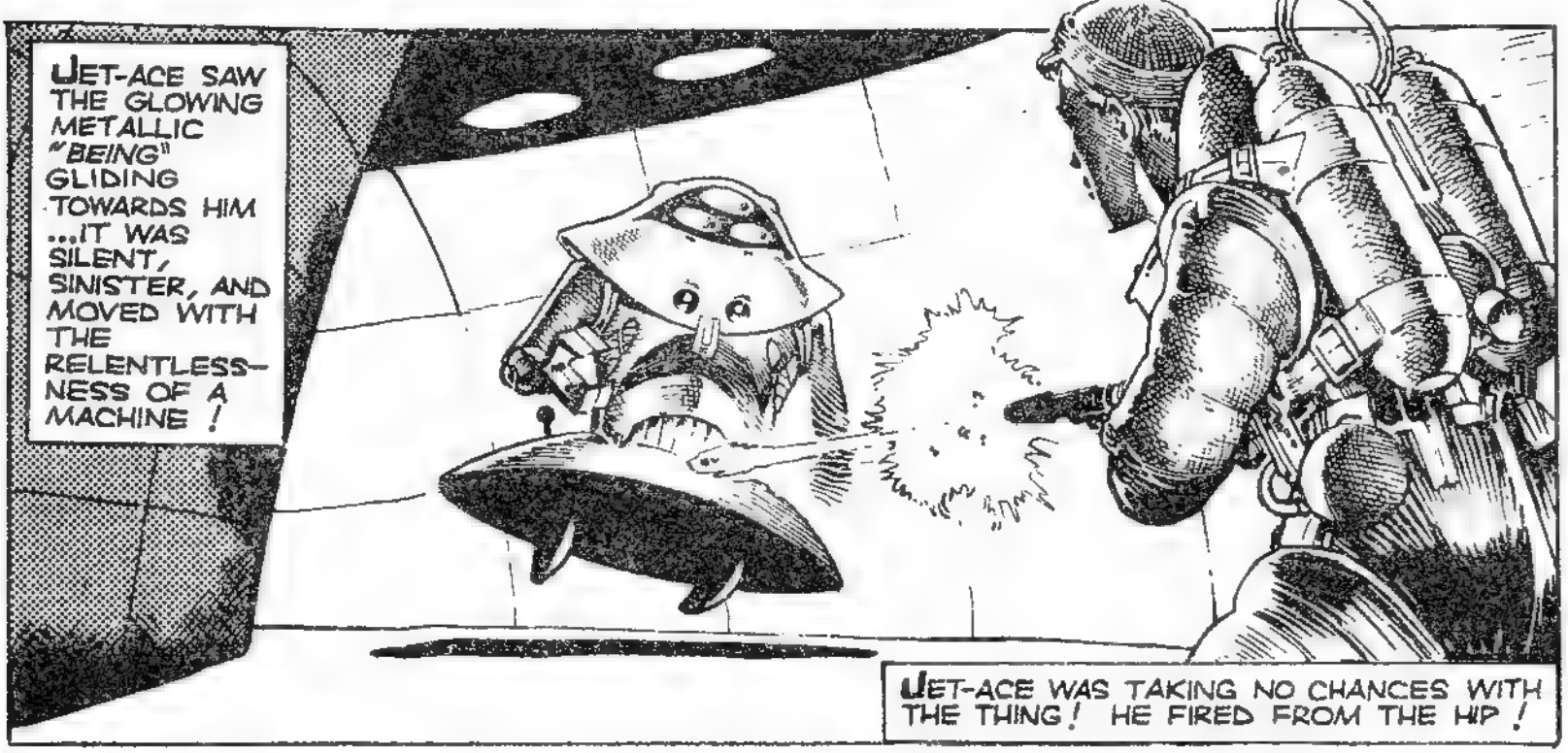

AS NEITHER PROSPECT OFFERED MUCH HOPE IN THE WAY OF SURVIVAL, JET-ACE DECIDED TO STAY WHERE HE WAS—ON Z-4. HE THUMPED THE QUICK-RELEASE KNOB ON HIS LIFE-LINE. IT JERKED AWAY, TO BECOME LOST FOR EVER!


JET-ACE GAZED AFTER THE INTERCEPTOR SHIP, WONDERING IF HE HAD MADE THE RIGHT DECISION AFTER ALL..BUT HIS UNCERTAINTY WAS KILLED THE INSTANT THE TINY SHIP BLEW TO FRAGMENTS!
WELL, THAT'S ONE DISASTER I'VE DODGED...I WONDER WHAT AWAITS ME INSIDE Z-4!

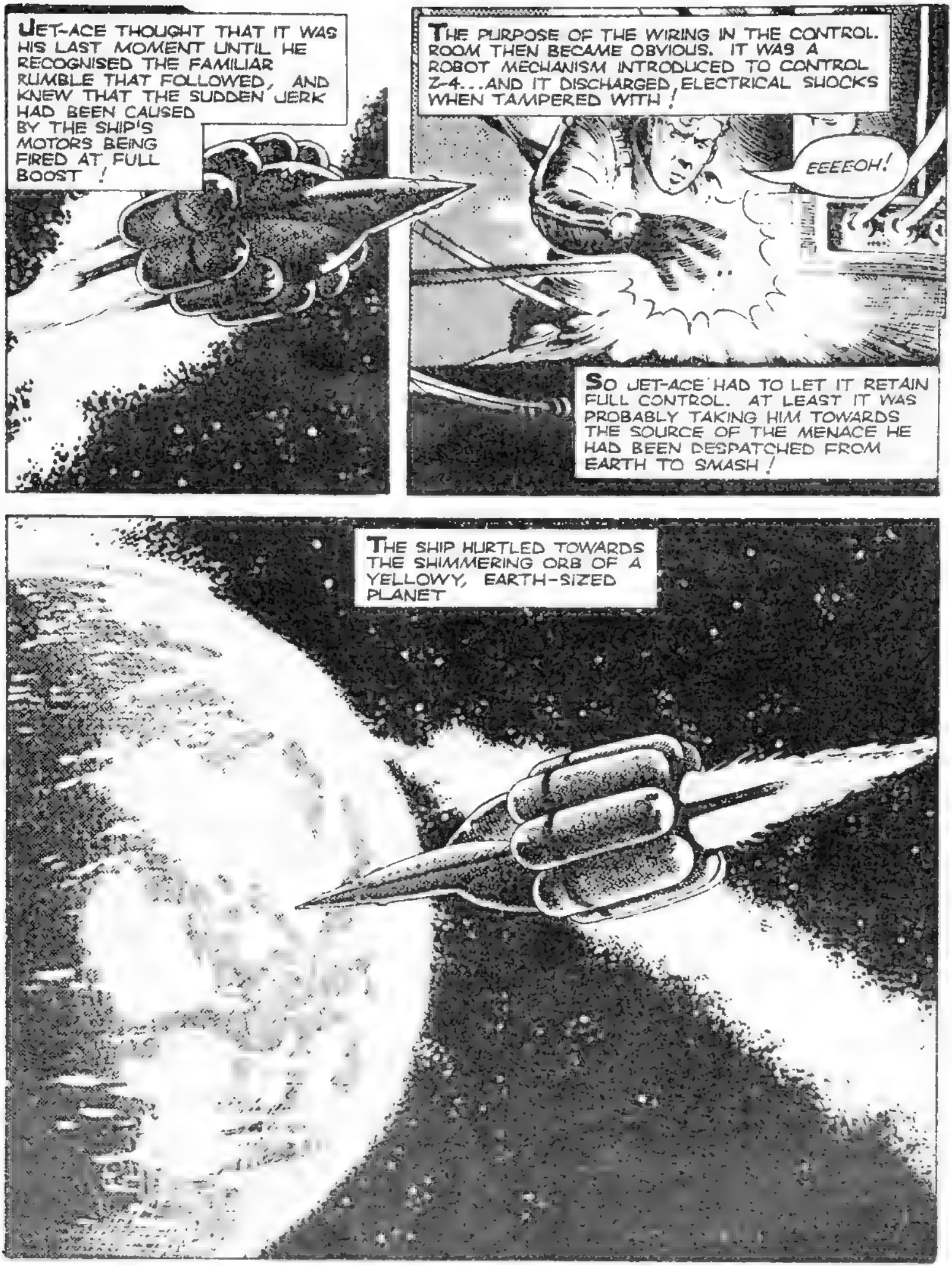

HE RAMMED HIS RIFLE BUTT AT THE PERCUSSION CATCH AGAIN, AND THIS TIME THE GREAT DOOR HINGED OPEN SMOOTHLY. . . .

A FEW SECONDS LATER, JET-ACE WAS INSIDE THE SHIP, REMOVING THE BOWL OF HIS SPACE-HELMET
FUNNY SMELL IN HERE..PERHAPS THE AIR-CONDITIONING ISN'T WORKING!
BUT, ALTHOUGH JET-ACE DID NOT KNOW IT, IT WAS THE AIR-CONDITIONING PLANT THAT HAD SAVED HIS LIFE—BY CLEARING MOST OF THE FUMES THAT THE ALIENS HAD PUMPED ABOARD!


UNAWARE OF HIS LUCK, JET-ACE WALKED TOWARDS THE CONTROL ROOM, THEN FROZE RIGID AS HE NEARED THE PERSONNEL AIR-LOCK!
TH-THERE'S ONE OF THEM... AND IT'S SEEN ME! IT'S COMING THIS WAY!


JET-ACE SAW THE GLOWING METALLIC "BEING" GLIDING TOWARDS HIM ...IT WAS SILENT, SINISTER, AND MOVED WITH THE RELENTLESS-NESS OF A MACHINE !
JET-ACE WAS TAKING NO CHANCES WITH THE THING ! HE FIRED FROM THE HIP !

THE SHOT STRUCK HOME, EXPLODED THE TARGET, AND SENT SLIVERS OF METAL SMASHING AGAINST THE SHIP WALLS
AS THE SMOKE CLEARED, JET-ACE EDGED FORWARD TO EXAMINE THE PIECES
NO SIGN OF ANY FORM OF LIFE AMONG THE WRECKAGE...THE THING MUST HAVE BEEN ENTIRELY UNDER REMOTE CONTROL! I WONDER WHAT PURPOSE IT HAD?
HE DECIDED TO CONTINUE HIS WAY TO THE CONTROL ROOM. ON THE WAY HE NOTICED THAT THE PERSONNEL AIR-LOCK WAS CLOSED AND NO LONGER BEING USED BY THE ALIENS. HE THOUGHT THAT THEY HAD DESERTED THE SHIP UNTIL HE CLIMBED UP ON TO THE MAIN DECK...
WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON UP HERE?
NO SIGN OF COBB OR THE OTHERS ... JUST THIS TANGLE OF CABLES!
JET-ACE WAS LOOKING FOR SOME INDICATION OF THE FATE OF HIS FELLOW CREWMEN, WHEN THE SHIP ROLLED SLIGHTLY UNDER HIS FEET.....
THE ALIENS HAVE CAST-OFF...AND LEFT THIS THING ABOARD! IT'S A DEVICE TO DESTROY THIS SHIP AS SOON AS THEY'RE CLEAR OF IT... JUST AS THEY BLEW UP MY INTERCEPTOR!
JET-ACE LOGAN WAS TRAPPED. HE FOUGHT TO ESCAPE FROM THE CABIN, TO REACH AN ESCAPE CAPSULE THAT WOULD THROW HIM CLEAR—BUT THE SHIP MOVED AGAIN, VIOLENTLY, AND THREW HIM HEAVILY!
AAAGH!


JET-ACE THOUGHT THAT IT WAS HIS LAST MOMENT UNTIL HE RECOGNISED THE FAMILIAR RUMBLE THAT FOLLOWED, AND KNEW THAT THE SUDDEN JERK HAD BEEN CAUSED BY THE SHIP'S MOTORS BEING FIRED AT FULL BOOST!
THE PURPOSE OF THE WIRING IN THE CONTROL ROOM THEN BECAME OBVIOUS. IT WAS A ROBOT MECHANISM INTRODUCED TO CONTROL Z-4...AND IT DISCHARGED ELECTRICAL SHOCKS WHEN TAMPERED WITH!
EEEEOH!
SO JET-ACE HAD TO LET IT RETAIN FULL CONTROL. AT LEAST IT WAS PROBABLY TAKING HIM TOWARDS THE SOURCE OF THE MENACE HE HAD BEEN DESPATCHED FROM EARTH TO SMASH!
THE SHIP HURTLED TOWARDS THE SHIMMERING ORB OF A YELLOWY, EARTH-SIZED PLANET

AND AT LENGTH IT MADE A PERFECT LANDING ON THE UNKNOWN WORLD!
Z4
JET-ACE WAS STILL GAZING OUT AT THE STARTLING SCENERY WHEN A SHORT PROCESSION LEFT THE ALIEN SHIP THAT WAS STANDING NEARBY
PLUMDUFF! COBBY! AND THE OTHERS... ALL CAPTIVE AND BEING MARCHED AWAY.. TO WHAT?
SO FAR LOGAN HAD SEEN NO SIGNS OF ALIEN LIFE. THE ROBOTS STILL SEEMED TO BE IN CONTROL
I'VE GOT TO SAVE THEM! I'VE GOT TO PUT UP A FIGHT AND FREE THE OTHERS!
JET-ACE LOGAN TURNED AND SAW A GRIM HALF-CIRCLE OF HOVERING MACHINES ABOUT TO CLOSE IN ON HIM
STAY WHERE YOU ARE, LOGAN! DO NOT MOVE!

LOGAN REMAINED RIGID— NOT IN OBEDIENCE TO THE COMMAND, BUT TO THINK OUT HIS NEXT MOVE!

I MUSTN'T GIVE IN! I'M THE ONLY ONE LEFT WHO CAN FIGHT!

THEN LOGAN MOVED..LOW, HARD AND FAST!

FOR A FEW SECONDS THE MACHINES WERE CONFUSED BY LOGAN'S SUDDEN MANOEUVRE. BUT THIS WAS ALL THE TIME HE NEEDED TO REACH THE CAR THAT WAS SKIMMING TOWARDS THE CITY

WE THOUGHT THEY'D FINISHED YOU WAY OUT IN SPACE!

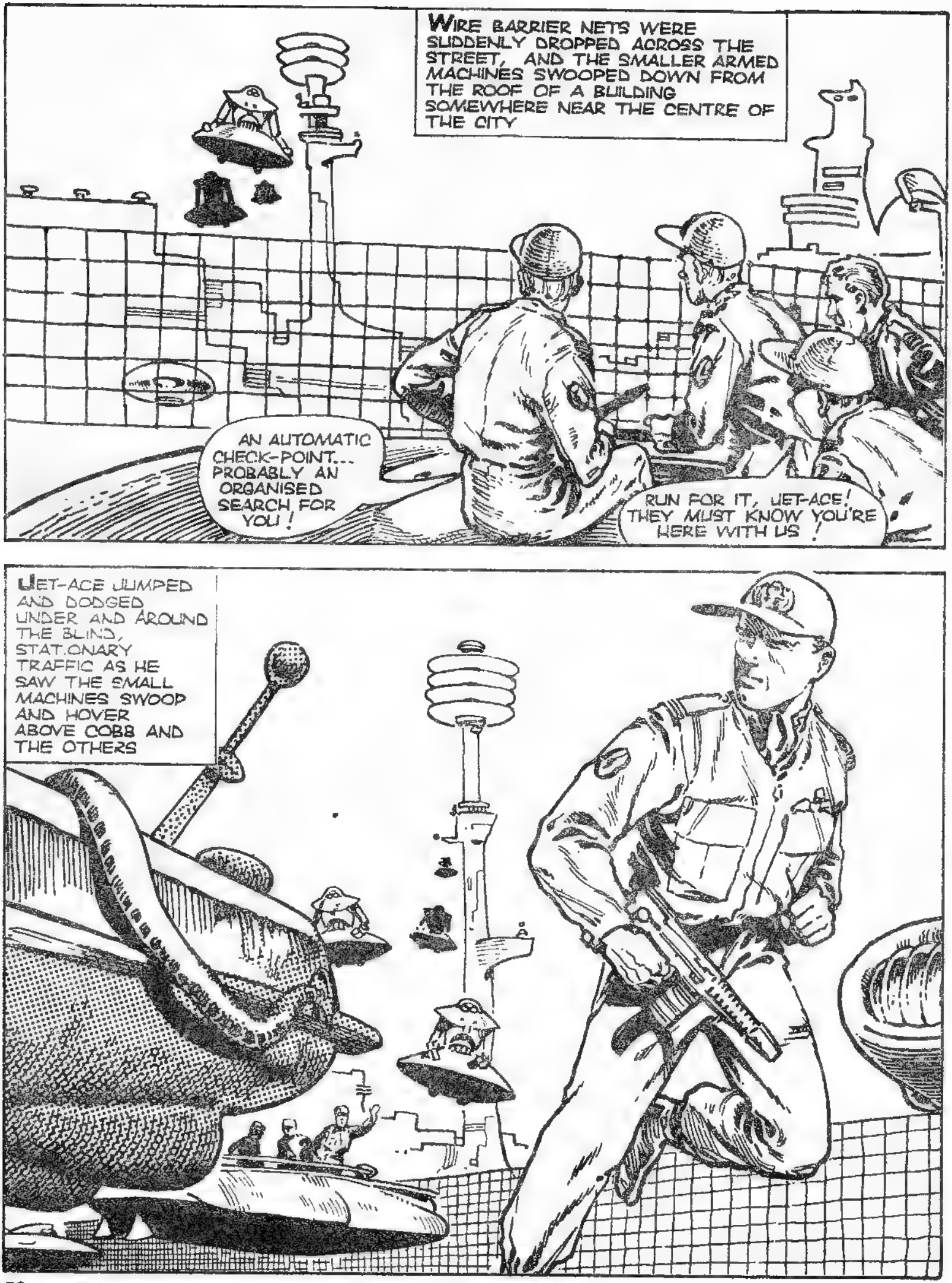
LOGAN!

I'M NOT FINISHED YET, BOYS!

UNAWARE OF ITS EXTRA PASSENGER, THE AUTOMATIC CAR SPED ON ITS COURSE INTO THE CITY.. WITH ITS PEOPLELESS STREETS AND WINDOWLESS BUILDINGS. . . .

THERE'S NO SIGN OF LIFE ANYWHERE! THIS WHOLE PLACE IS RUN BY MACHINES!

NEVER MIND THAT, LOGAN! THINK OF SOME WAY WE CAN BREAK OUT!


WIRE BARRIER NETS WERE SUDDENLY DROPPED ACROSS THE STREET, AND THE SMALLER ARMED MACHINES SWOOPED DOWN FROM THE ROOF OF A BUILDING SOMEWHERE NEAR THE CENTRE OF THE CITY
AN AUTOMATIC CHECK-POINT... PROBABLY AN ORGANISED SEARCH FOR YOU!
RUN FOR IT, JET-ACE! THEY MUST KNOW YOU'RE HERE WITH US!
JET-ACE JUMPED AND DODGED UNDER AND AROUND THE BLIND, STATIONARY TRAFFIC AS HE SAW THE SMALL MACHINES SWOOP AND HOVER ABOVE COBB AND THE OTHERS

THEN, ALL AT ONCE, THE TRAFFIC MOVED AGAIN. EVERY VEHICLE WITHIN SIGHT NOSED INTO THE BUILDING NEAREST TO IT. WITHIN SECONDS THE STREETS WERE DESERTED

WITH THE STREETS CLEARED THEY'LL FIND ME EASILY!

JET-ACE CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF THE PRISON CAR AS IT WHIPPED THROUGH THE ENTRANCE TO A HUGE BUILDING. AT THE SAME MOMENT A SQUADRON OF THE SMALL MACHINES SCUTTLED OUT. THE MANHUNT WAS ON!

THEY MEAN TO FIND ME IN A HURRY!

I'LL HAVE TO KEEP OFF THE MAIN STREETS UNTIL I CAN FIND A CORNER TO HIDE — IF THERE IS SUCH A PLACE IN THIS CITY!

FOR A MOMENT HE THOUGHT HE HAD FOUND THE PERFECT HIDE-OUT WHEN HE ENTERED A SCRAP-YARD OF BROKEN MACHINERY, BUT ONE OF THE HUNTERS HAD SEEN HIM STUMBLING DOWN THE ALLEY

THEY'VE SEEN ME! I'M TRAPPED!

HE LOOKED AROUND DESPERATELY FOR A WAY OF ESCAPE. THEN HE SAW AN ANCIENT, RUSTED MAN-HOLE AT HIS FEET

DON'T KNOW WHERE THIS GOES, BUT AT LEAST IT'LL GET ME OFF THE STREETS!

LOGAN DROPPED INTO A SEWER TUNNEL THROUGH WHICH WATER WAS FLOWING. BUT HIS PURSUER WAS RELENTLESS...

JET-ACE HAD AIMED HIS GUN AT THE SMOOTH METAL OBJECT, WHEN HIS EYES PICKED OUT OTHER SINISTER SHAPES CLINGING TO THE SEWER'S WALLS
SOME KIND OF RATS!

AT THAT SAME INSTANT THE BEASTS JUMPED, FLINGING THEMSELVES FANG AND CLAW UPON THE METAL MACHINE!

WITHIN SECONDS, THE MACHINE WAS HALF-SUBMERGED IN THE WATER, WHILE THE HIDEOUS CREATURES TORE AT ITS THIN METAL PLATES. JET-ACE LOGAN PULLED HIS FLASHLAMP FROM HIS POCKET AND SHONE IT AROUND HIM...
DOZENS OF EVIL BLACK EYES STARED HUNGRILY TOWARDS HIM!

THERE WAS A NERVOUS SCRATCHING ON THE WALLS, THEN THE FIRST WEIRD CREATURE HURLED ITSELF AT JET-ACE...

INSTINCTIVELY HE FIRED.....

I CAN'T DO THAT TOO OFTEN, OR I'LL BRING THE TUNNEL ROOF DOWN ON MY OWN HEAD!

THE SINGLE SHOT HAD MASSACRED SCORES OF RATS ...BUT THERE WERE HUNDREDS MORE! THEY CRAWLED OUT FROM EVERYWHERE...
UGH! THE BRUTES! MAYBE I CAN ESCAPE THROUGH THAT GRILLE!

IT'S RUSTY.. BUT IT WILL OPEN!
JET-ACE SQUIRMED THROUGH THE NARROW OPENING INTO A BARE, DIMLY-LIT CELLAR
HE DROPPED THE GRILLE BACK INTO PLACE AND LOOKED AROUND
STRANGE! NO DOORS! NO WINDOWS EXCEPT FOR A COUPLE OF AIR-BRICKS! NOTHING BUT PIPES AND MACHINERY!
HE CAME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE APPARATUS WAS PART OF A LARGE AIR-CONDITIONING PLANT. HE EXAMINED A LOOSE PLATE ON THE MACHINE...
THERE MAY BE A WAY OUT THROUGH HERE. UNLESS I'M MISTAKEN, THAT TUNNEL HAS LED ME INTO THE BUILDING INTO WHICH COBB AND THE OTHERS WERE TAKEN!
LOGAN WRENCHED BACK THE LOOSE PLATE, AND CRAWLED INSIDE THE SQUARE PIPE. THEN HE PROGRESSED SLOWLY BUT SURELY UPWARDS...

LOGAN CLIMBED ON AND ON, LOSING ALL SENSE OF TIME AND DISTANCE. AT LAST, A DUSTY SQUARE OF DAYLIGHT CUT ACROSS THE GLOOM. . .

AN AIR-VENT! LET'S HOPE THIS ONE MOVES, TOO!

BUT FIRST JET-ACE LOOKED INTO THE ROOM BEYOND TO SEE WHAT HE WAS BREAKING INTO. . .

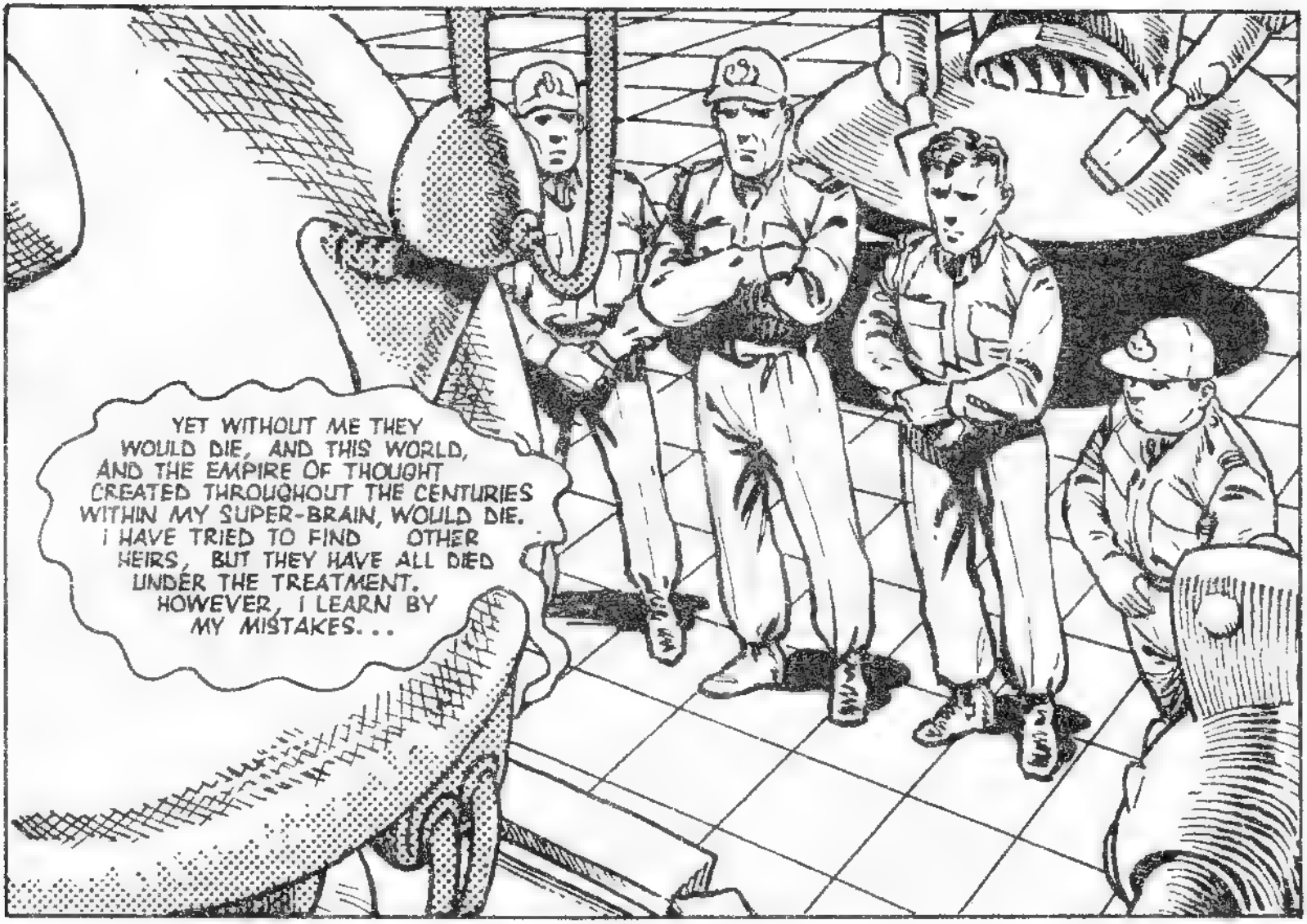
WHAT LUCK! COBB, PLUMDUFF, MORGAN AND HANSON!

A VOICE, SPEAKING IN STILTED ENGLISH, FILLED THE ROOM

GREETINGS, MY SONS! I CALL YOU 'SONS' BECAUSE I HAVE CHOSEN YOU TO BE CAREFULLY PREPARED FOR THE DAY THAT I SELECT ONE OF YOU AS MY HEIR!

LOGAN LOOKED CLOSER AT THE THE STRANGE FIGURE ON THE MASSIVE 'THRONE' IN THE CENTRE OF THE ROOM...
IF YOU RESPOND TO TREATMENT, ONE OF YOU WILL EVENTUALLY RECEIVE THIS EMPIRE AS HIS OWN! FOR I AM GROWING OLD, VERY OLD. I DOUBT IF I WILL SURVIVE A FURTHER FIVE HUNDRED YEARS. I NEED ANOTHER "DEVELOPED BRAIN" TO CONTINUE AFTER ME!

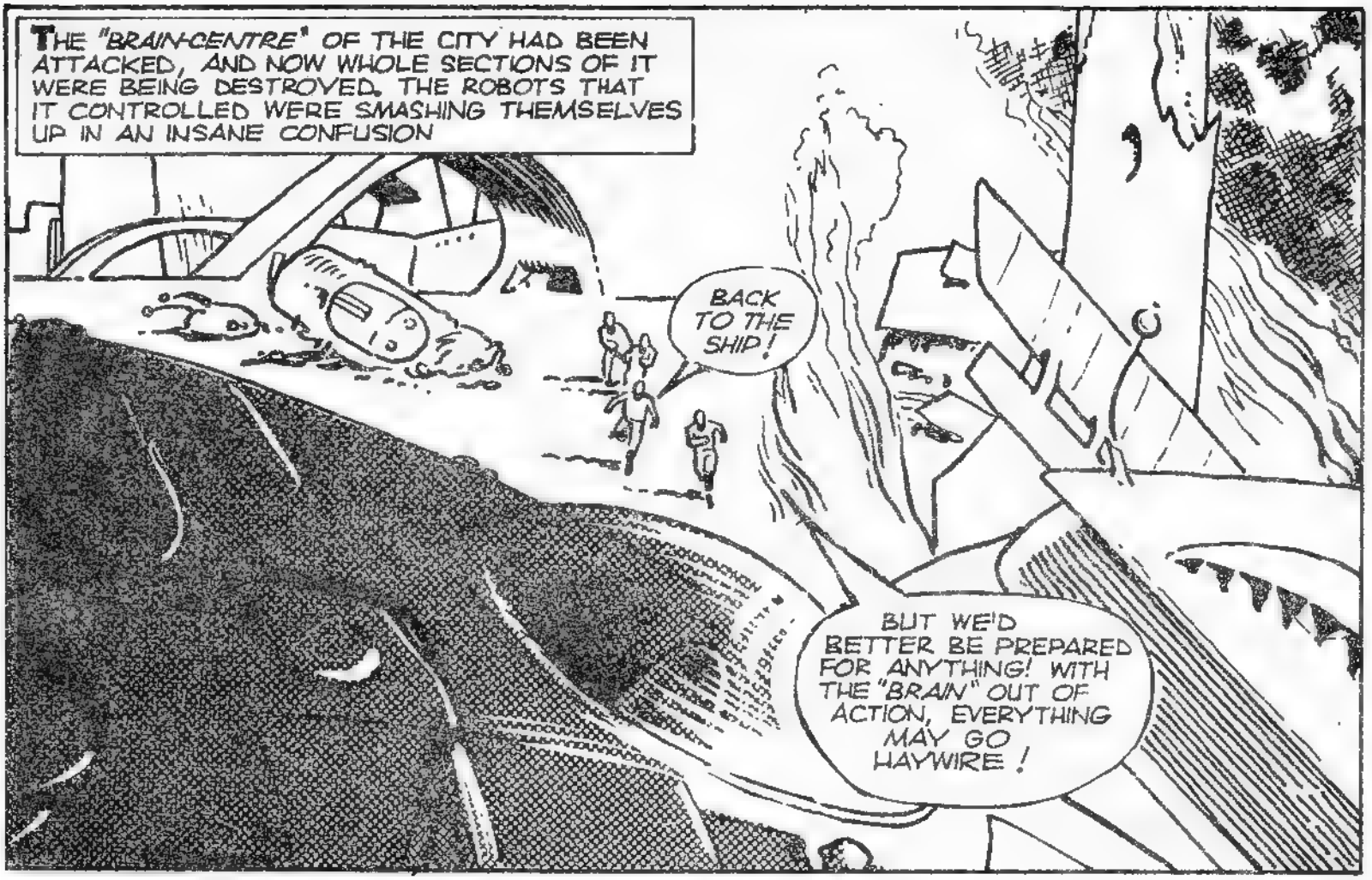
THE CAPTIVES QUAILED VISIBLY AT THE HORRIBLE MEANING OF 'THE BRAIN'S' WORDS
YOU WILL BE FORTUNATE, FOR YOUR MINDS WILL BE WASHED OF ALL YOUR EARTH THOUGHTS. YOUR BRAIN CELLS WILL BE NOURISHED SO THAT THEY GROW IN POWER AND MULTIPLY. YOUR BODY WILL WITHER, FOR IT WILL NO LONGER BE IMPORTANT TO YOU, SINCE THIS CITY AND IT'S MECHANICAL INHABITANTS WILL EXIST MERELY TO FULFIL YOUR NEEDS
THERE IS NOTHING MY MACHINES CANNOT DO...THEY EVEN TAPPED THE ELECTRONIC CIRCUITS ON YOUR SPACESHIP TO KILL SOME OF THE CREW AND TO BRING YOU OTHERS HERE


YET WITHOUT ME THEY WOULD DIE, AND THIS WORLD, AND THE EMPIRE OF THOUGHT CREATED THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES WITHIN MY SUPER-BRAIN, WOULD DIE. I HAVE TRIED TO FIND OTHER HEIRS, BUT THEY HAVE ALL DIED UNDER THE TREATMENT. HOWEVER, I LEARN BY MY MISTAKES...

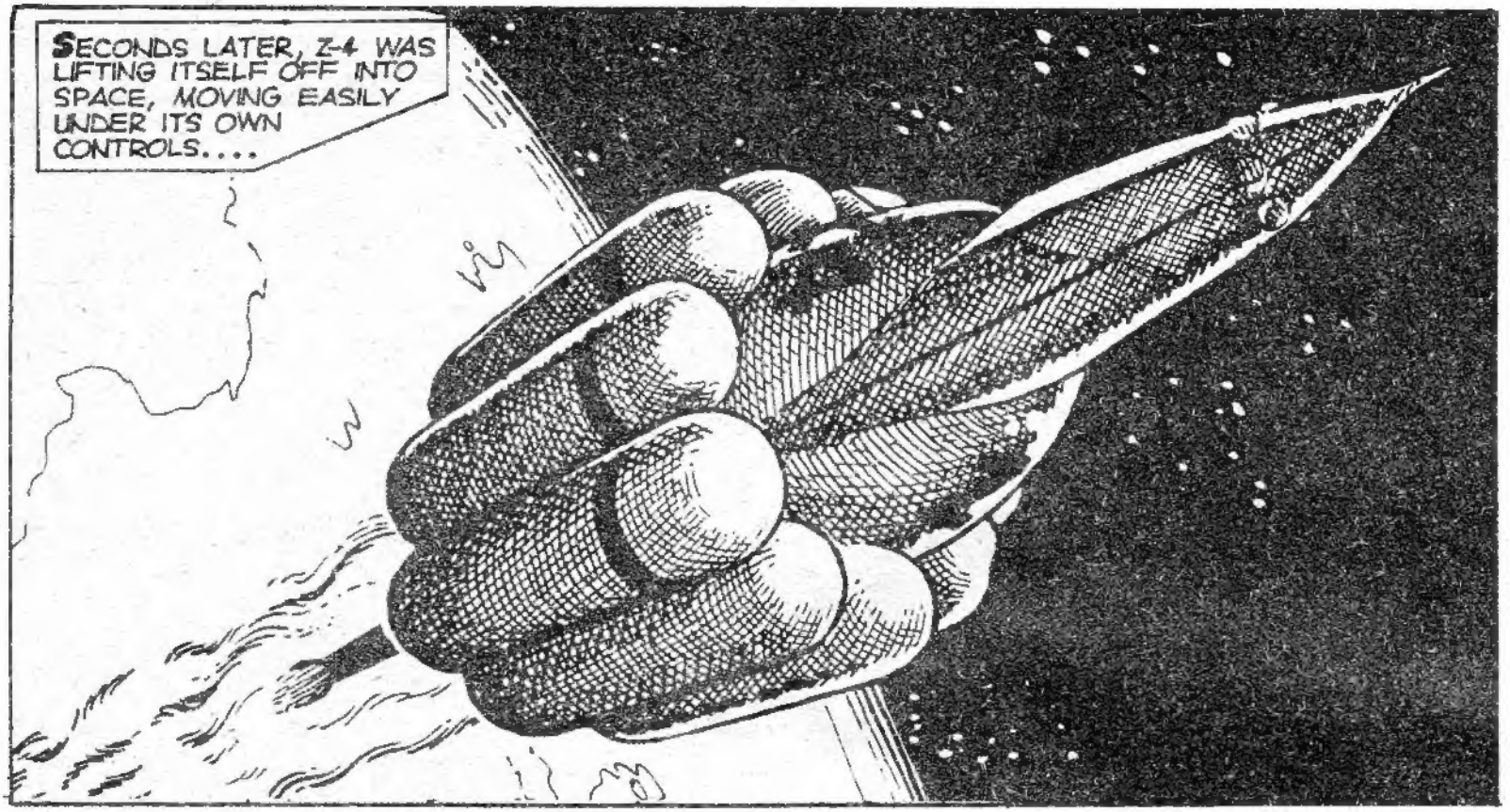
THE MACHINES GUARDING LOGAN'S COLLEAGUES MOVED IN, AND ONE OF THEIR GLINTING METAL ARMS SPRANG OUT TOWARDS HANSON. . . .
NO! NO! NOT ME! NO!
FROM THE GRILLE, LOGAN WATCHED HELPLESSLY, KNOWING THAT THERE WAS LITTLE HE COULD DO TO SAVE HIS FRIENDS FROM THEIR FATE. . . .!

IN THAT SAME INSTANT A BLUE ROD OF LIGHT STABBED AT HANSON...
AAAAGH!
THE MACHINES WASTED NO TIME SELECTING ANOTHER VICTIM. THIS TIME IT WAS MORGAN, AND THEY MADE SURE HE WOULD NOT BREAK AWAY. . . .
HELP! HELP ME, SOMEONE!
MEANWHILE, THE VICIOUS, SIX-LEGGED RODENTS OF THE UNDERWORLD WERE BREAKING THROUGH TO THE SURFACE!
THEY WERE HUNTING LOGAN, WHO HAD FOUGHT THEM IN THEIR UNDERGROUND LAIR. NOW THEY WERE TRACKING HIM ALONG HIS OWN ESCAPE ROUTE
THE RATS... THEY'RE CLIMBING UP AFTER ME!
JET-ACE PUNCHED OUT THE GRILLE TO ESCAPE THE DANGER CLAWING UP THE PIPE TOWARDS HIM. . . .
LOGAN!

BUT NOW THE RATS HAD OTHER PREY THAN LOGAN. THE BRAIN SHRIEKED IN HELPLESS PANIC AS THE MACHINES FOUGHT THE GREY-BROWN TIDE OF RODENTS!
MAKE FOR THE DOOR. LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!
HELP ME, LOGAN! THIS THING WON'T LET GO!
AT THAT MOMENT, ONE OF THE RATS LEAPED AT JET-ACE. WITH UNFLINCHING COURAGE HE CAUGHT IT IN MID-AIR AND THREW IT TOWARDS, MORGAN!
THIS WILL HELP YOU, MORGAN!
THE RODENT HIT THE MACHINE HOLDING MORGAN. A SECOND LATER, IT WAS TEARING AT IT WITH ITS CLAWS AND TEETH!
THANKS, JET-ACE!
RUN—BEFORE THE RAT GOES FOR YOU!
THAT WAS A CLOSE CALL, JET-ACE! BUT WHY DO THE RATS GO FOR THE MACHINES?
NO IDEA... BUT THEY CERTAINLY SEEM TO HATE 'EM!


THE "BRAIN-CENTRE" OF THE CITY HAD BEEN ATTACKED, AND NOW WHOLE SECTIONS OF IT WERE BEING DESTROYED. THE ROBOTS THAT IT CONTROLLED WERE SMASHING THEMSELVES UP IN AN INSANE CONFUSION
BACK TO THE SHIP!
BUT WE'D BETTER BE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING! WITH THE "BRAIN" OUT OF ACTION, EVERYTHING MAY GO HAYWIRE!

WOW! THAT WAS CLOSE!
THERE'S Z-4! COME ON!



THE SHIP WAS ONCE AGAIN GUIDED BY ORDINARY MEN, WHO HAD BROKEN THE SINISTER POWER OF A "MASTER-INTELLIGENCE" THAT HAD REACHED OUT ACROSS SPACE TO SNATCH AT THEIR VERY MINDS!
ME, TOO! LET'S SHAKE ON IT!
I TAKE BACK ALL I SAID ABOUT YOU ON THE WAY OUT, JET-ACE!
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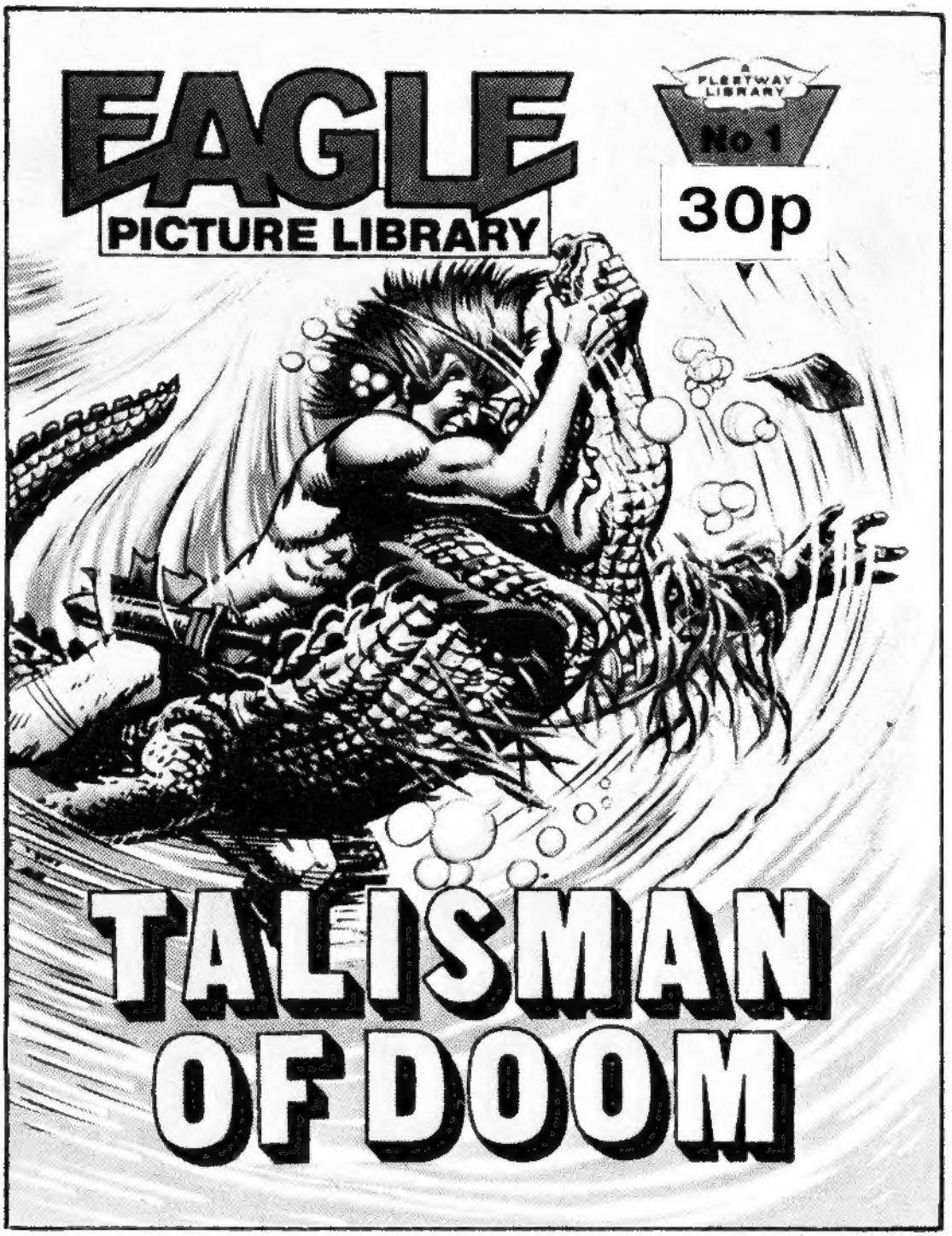

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